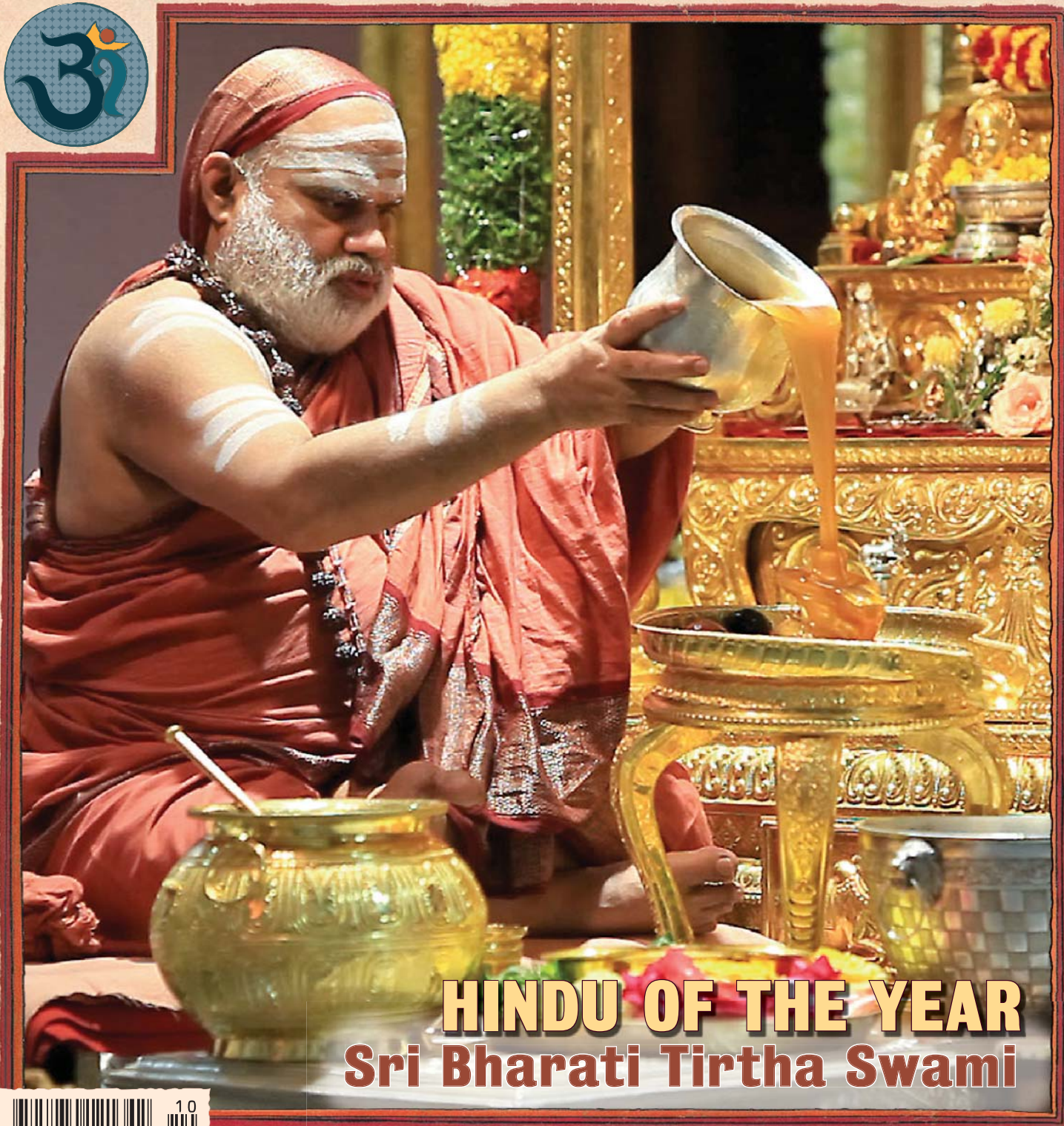


HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



HINDU OF THE YEAR
Sri Bharati Tirtha Swami

SRINGERI SHARADA PEETHAM / RAJESH KRISHNAN



COVER: During Sivaratri, our Hindu of the Year performs *abhishekam* to the Chandramouliswara Sphatika Linga given by Sri Adi Shankara; in 2009 US President Barack Obama lights the Diwali lamp at the White House as Sri Narayanachar Digalakote chants.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2011 • HINDU YEAR 5113
KHARA, THE YEAR OF HARDSHIP

Bodhinatha Veylanswami www.gurudeva.org

INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** Goa: the Myth and the Reality **18**
Hindu of the Year: The Monk-Scholar Who Leads
One of India's Great Spiritual Institutions **30**
Insight: Come on a Twenty-Page Visual Tour
of India, Her Past and Her Present **40**

LIFESTYLE

- Theology:** Four (More) Questions that Hindus
Get Asked and Four Terrific Answers **60**
Health: What's a College Vegetarian to Do? **66**
Commentary: Three Rules of Thumb for Visiting
a Hindu Temple: a Guide for Non-Hindus **70**

OPINION

- In My Opinion:** One Educator's Call to Bring
Religion Back into the Classroom **9**
Publisher's Desk: Learning to Make Your
House God's Home **10**
Letters **12**
From the Agamas: The Sacred Way to Establish a
Village or Enter Your New Home **17**

DIGESTS

- Global Dharma** **6**
Quotes & Quips **14**
Digital Dharma **86**

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UK GBP 5



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**Best Hindu
Magazine**

Ancient Traditions

Youthful Ardor

Sriram, age 10, performs evening worship on the banks of river Tunga in Sringeri as a student of the Rig Veda at the Sadvidya Sanjeevini Samskrita Pathashala under the Sringeri Vedic Pathashala.

It has been so for thousands of years: young men, living in community with their teachers, learn to recite Sanskrit shlokas and perform powerful incantations. In time, they mature into priests who can connect all three worlds. This sacred art is preserved and taught at pathashalas throughout India, like the one at Sringeri Matha. ...page 18



GLOBAL DHARMA

NEW YORK

Tradition Versus Environment

NEW YORK PARK RANGERS and Hindus are in a standoff over holy debris in Jamaica Bay, which is part of New York State's Gateway National Recreation Area. According to a *New York Times* report, Hindu offerings to Mother Ganga are a mounting problem. Coconut shells, decaying limes, water-logged colored cloth, incense sticks, pictures and even cremation ashes are washing up on shore. Rangers responsible

for the fragile habitat, an enclosed bay that does not sweep refuse away, are trying to be diplomatic, talking to Hindu groups to educate them on the environmental pollution and "Leave No Trace" policies. But Hindu priests are not willing to tell devotees they cannot make what some consider obligatory offerings to Ganga. Some Hindus are collaborating with officials on clean up, while others continue making offerings.



Madan Padarat and his wife, Nalini Kowlassar, immigrants from Guyana, releasing a coconut and flower into Jamaica Bay.

IDAHO

Public Ganesha Protested

LAKE COEUR IS ONE OF AMERICA's fabulous scenic Rocky Mountain tourist magnets. Locals work hard to overcome

Northern Idaho's stigma of being a center for the white supremacy group, Aryan Nations. But Coeur d'Alene City officials received another publicity blow after including a sculpture of Ganesha in a year-long public art display. The Kootenai Constitution Party, claiming that the US was founded on Christianity, protested the piece, calling it an "abomination" installed by a "godless group." Some local citizens reacted by citing freedom of religion and mounted a protest to protest the protesters. The art stayed.



"Ganesha," a metal sculpture by Spokane, Washington, artist Rick Davis



This elaborate Nandi kuthirakettu ratham (a chariot of Lord Siva's bull vehicle) is one of seventeen that are pulled with music and dance to the Parabrahma Siva temple each year in Nooranad, Kerala

KERALA

Gigantic Chariot Splendor

IN THE MALAYALAM MONTH OF KUMBHA EACH YEAR IN THE DISTRICT of Alappuzha in Kerala, Hindus conduct the Kettukazhcha festival. It is perhaps the most extravagant of all Hindu temple chariot festivals. Instead of the Deity leaving the temple for a public parade, devotees build elaborate towering offerings and pull them with great energy to the temple. Each of the big temples in Alappuzha has attached village areas called *karas*. After Maha Sivaratri each year, in the days preceding the *bharani nakshatra*, *karas* artisans vie with each other to create the most intricately decorated *kuthiras* (effigies), some reaching 70-80 feet. The most famous are the Nandi bulls that are taken to the Padanilam Parabrahma temple where Lord Siva is present as the integration of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva and the gigantic chariots carrying *kuthiras* of Bhima and Hanuman who are taken to the 1,200 year-old Bhagavathi temple in Chettikulangara. Devotees also offer miniature *kuthiras*. On the afternoon of *aswini nakshatra*, the whole village departs for the temple, the men pulling the chariot. The arrival of multiple *ratham* at the temple is a huge, exciting spectacle. The main festival rites are done the following morning during *bharani nakshatra* and then the *rathas* return home for another year.

KARNATAKA

Predatory Conversions

BY R. GURU PRASAD

D. R. M. CHIDANANDAMURTHY, noted researcher, columnist and a social activist in Bangalore, released a case study in March, 2011, on Christians proselytizing with cash. Murthy and his friend Ramachandra Upadhy where shocked by discoveries they made in Manjunathanagar near Marathahalli. First, Murthy reports, missionaries identify Hindu families who are financially weak. Evangelists and their local agents go to low-income homes carrying sweets and an attractive, framed image of Jesus. Money is offered if the family will include Jesus in the home shrine. Phase two comes a few weeks later: another cash payment to place Jesus more visibly over and above the Hindu Gods. In phase three another, larger cash gift is paid to those who discard all images of Hindu

Gods and Goddesses. Afraid to throw images and sculptures of Hindu Gods into the dust bin, poor, gullible Hindus place them in the premises of Vasuki Subramanya Temple out on the national Highway.

In the next stage, more money is used to induce families to fully embrace Christianity and display Christian symbols in their house. Murthy comments in his study: "It is a bargain, and if the converted Christian is willing to wear a cross around his neck, he gets another bonus from the agents who also earn incentive money for their work from foreign funds used by Christian missionaries." He notes that agents are also preying on Hindus who are sick, offering a free prayer meeting to get rid of diseases under the guise of converting them to Christianity under the pretext of a "faith" healing.



Borough residents petition to save Navaratri funding

UNITED KINGDOM

Brent Cuts Events Funding

AMONG A POPULATION OF over 260,000 in the London borough of Brent, seventeen percent declared themselves Hindu in the 2001 census. Brent's generous policy to provide financial support for 14 annual ethnic festivals is being reduced due to lack of funds. In June, 2011, 6,000 residents petitioned to continue support for Navaratri, pleading their case for

its cultural value. Their bid was successful. Navaratri was kept in the 2011 budget, as was Diwali, which was attended by 60,000 in 2010 compared to 1,000 for the Saint Patrick's day parade. Based on "equality assessments," however, support for more activities may be reduced in 2012, including Navaratri, Saint Patrick's Day parades, Islam's Eid day, and even Christmas street lights.



They conduct opulent Hindus wedding for others; but some priests are so poor they or their sons struggle to fetch a bride of their own

INDIA

Hindu Priests Bereft of Brides

A MAY REPORT BY K.

Venugopal in the *Deccan Chronicle* highlights a growing problem in South Kerala. Hundreds of young priests are in distress because no family is willing to give them a bride. "They are in a very sad situation," said Akkeraman Kalidasa Bhattathiripad, president of the Yogakshema Sabha. An office-bearer of the sabha, Mr. Radhakrishnan Potti, explained, "Priests are officially equivalent to sweepers in the

Travancore Devaswom Board's (TDB—a government-appointed Hindu temple administration body) scheme. Despite umpteen demands, the arrogant TDB is not even willing to give them the post of sub-group officer." With no status and a salary of only Rs 5,000 a month (US\$112.00) no prospective bride's family will have them. "Priests don't even have a welfare fund, since they are not even considered employees," Potti added.

NEPAL

Macchendranatha Lives on

RATO MACCHENDRANATHA'S temple is located in South Tabahal, Nepal. The God of rain, He is considered a form of Siva by Hindus, while Buddhists believe the Deity to be a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara. Each year, following the Nepali New Year, a huge wooden chariot wheels the image of the Red Macchendranath around Patan City in a series of complex celebrations to invoke monsoon rains. Despite the overthrow of the king and a new, leftist government, this year's festival ran with as much zeal as ever.

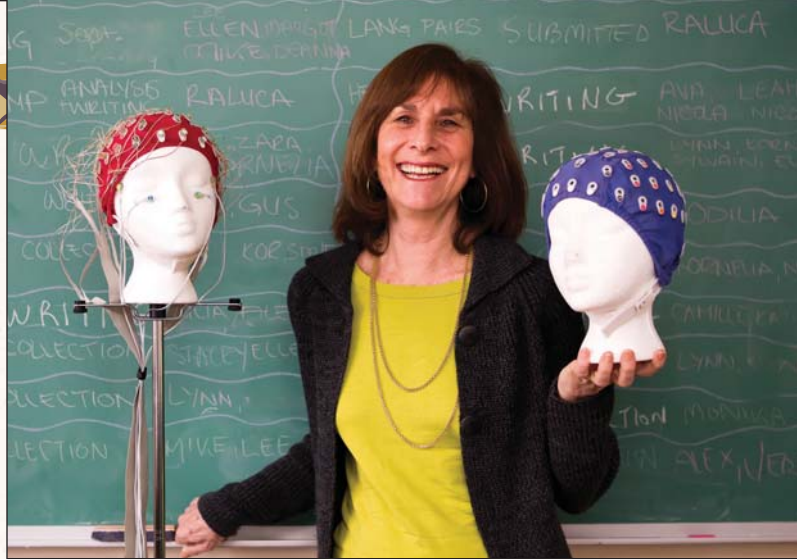
.....
Rato Machhendranatha's gigantic chariot lurches in the wind, making for an exciting parade



Healthier Multilingual Brains

HINDU PARENTS WHO TRY TO cajole their kids to keep up or learn a second language can now bring some hard science to that discussion. Dr. Ellen Bialystok is a cognitive neuroscientist working at York University in Toronto, Canada, who has researched bilingual brains for almost forty years. Her research hit the limelight in 2010 when she received the prestigious \$100,000 Killam Prize for her contributions to social science.

Her research shows that bilingual brains have better cognitive skills and "executive control systems" more capable of managing and filtering information. Being bilingual can also delay symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. Bialystok adds, "Learning other languages is important because it helps you understand other people, other cultures, other ways of thinking. Even if it didn't change your brain, there are just so many benefits."



Dr. Bialystok's brain mapping shows bilinguals use different pathways for problem solving. But, it's not enough to learn a few words of another language; you need to be using both languages all the time.

AYURVEDA / NATURAL MEDICINE

Natural Medicines Are Now Regulated in Europe

ALTERNATIVE HEALTH CARE practitioners are up in arms. Dreaded new regulations called the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive (THMPD) went into effect for member countries of the European Union in April, 2011.

Critics point out that compliance with quality control requirements and the dossier for registration can cost as much as US\$80,000 for a single herb and US\$300,000 for a product with multiple ingredients. Small companies with diverse

products are knocked out of the market. Getting authorization to sell any herbal product requires vendors to demonstrate that it has been in use in the EU for 30 years, or 15 years within the EU and 30 years outside the EU. Even when such usage can be established (for example a product made with tumeric, amala and boswellia may have been in use for fifteen years in the European Union and over 30 years in India) the cost to register is prohibitive.

Control now rests in the hands of the European Medicines Agency (EMA), based in London, which approves

.....
Ayurvedic and Chinese medicinal herbs used in the Asia for thousands of years are disappearing from the store shelves in Europe



registration for all medicinal products—modern drugs, vitamins and herbals alike, and is accused of bias toward big pharmaceutical interests.

In June, 2011, the European Parliament refused to sign off on EMA accounts, with members accusing the EMA of working to protect pharmaceutical profits. The Parliament's revelations validate claims that THMPD was developed under the influence of World Health Organization's drive for global implementation of Codex Alimentarius, the UN "health food book." Critics point out that WHO gets two thirds of its funding from pharmaceutical companies. In the US, vitamins and herbals are still classified as foods and, at least for now, are freely available.

ingly served meat to go forward. If the Hindus win, the Mogul Express in Edison, New Jersey, which served them meat-filled samosas, may pay travel costs to India to obtain purification rites.

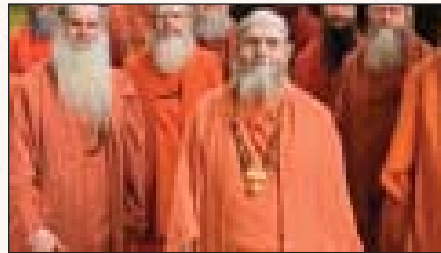
THE DIGITIZATION PROJECT of palm leaf manuscripts at the French Institute in Pondicherry, which was conceived and managed by our own HINDUISM TODAY team, was completed in June, 2011. Total photos of palm leaves (and a

few books) in Grantha, Devanagiri and Tamil: 1,017,324.

THE INCREDIBLE TREASURE recently found in the vaults of the 16th Century Sree Padmanabhaswamy in Kerala is still being counted, with more crypts yet to be opened. The total value of gold and silver jewelry and precious stones found so far is said to exceed 15 lakh crore, or over 30 billion dollars. We plan do a story in the January, 2012, issue.



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Call for Religious Education

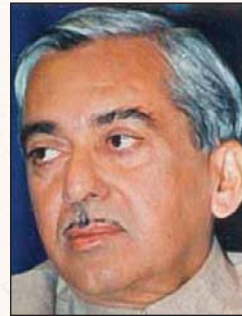
Secularism in education means teaching about all religions, not being silent on the subject

BY DR. J.S. RAJPUT

RELIGIOSITY HAS BEEN put on the back burner in India. The adherents of Hinduism are treated as pariahs the moment they talk of ancient India, Indian heritage, culture, the Vedas and India's contribution to global civilization during the last two millennia, if not even earlier. India is in an unusual situation; the majority of the population fear being labeled "communal," that is, against one religion or another. They may be so labeled by those who follow a post-independence interpretation of secularism in which religion is to be avoided. But those leaders of India's original freedom struggle who lived to see this interpretation of secularism have urged us to consider religion, especially in education.

One of the sharpest minds in contemporary history, C. Rajagopalachari, warned in the late 60s: "Mass education, in the sense herein explained, which is to result not only in knowledge and mental preference of the good but in the capacity and readiness to work and suffer for it, cannot, so far as I see, be organized except on a religious base; religious in the broadest sense. To misunderstand the 'secularity' to which people think we are pledged and to treat religion as untouchable is one of the many unfortunate follies our government has fallen into. It is not impossible, or even very difficult, to deal with and include religion in a nationwide effort to make men truly religious, each in the way shown by his or her own religion and add to it a spirit of understanding and respect for other people's religion and way of life."

Raja Ji's contemporary Maulana Abul Kalam Azad expressed similar views in 1948: "Our present difficulties, unlike those of Europe, are not creation of materialistic zealots but of religious fanatics. If we want to overcome them, the solution lies not in rejecting religious instruction in elementary stages but in imparting sound and healthy religious education under our direct supervision so that misguided credulism may not affect the



children in their plastic stage." Maulana had examined the consequences of divorcing religions from education in the following terms: "What will be the consequence if the government undertakes to impart purely secular education? Naturally, people will try to provide religious education to their children through private sources. How these private sources are working today or are likely

to work in future is already known to you. I know something about it and can say that, not only in villages but even in cities, the imparting of religious education is entrusted to teachers who are literate but not educated."

Hinduism accepts Divinity in every creation, every human being included. It cannot be unfair to any person of a different faith. Consequently, secularism is an inbuilt part of Hinduism in the sense that it implores everyone to remain true to his own faith and at the same time support others in being true to theirs. There could hardly be an approach more conducive to creating a cohesive world order that survives on mutual respect and creates conditions for living and working together, the prime requirement of our times.

The judiciary has also realized the role of religions in inculcating moral and ethical values in children and citizens. In a 2002 judgment, the Supreme Court stated, "Children must be made aware of [the] basics of all the religions of the people of India. They should know the commonalities and learn to respect differences wherever these exist." This in no way violates the spirit of secularism as enshrined in India's constitution. The extent of mutuality amongst religions is a measure of the maturity of people and communities. Hinduism continuously reaffirms that learning is a process that continues until life proceeds on the other journey.

PROFESSOR J.S. RAJPUT is the former chairperson of the National Council for Teacher Education and former director of NCERT. Email: rajput_js@yahoo.co.in

BRIEFLY...

TEENAGERS IN MUMBAI ARE BEING trained to do puja to make up the deficit in priests required to perform rites for the annual Ganesha Chaturthi celebrations. Over 12,000 mandals and 180,000 households need to have pujas done, but the city only has about 4,000 priests. Under the program, which is conducted by the

Brihanmumbai Sarvajanic Ganeshotsav Samanvaya Samiti in Mumbai, elder priests will mentor and initiate youngsters, teach them a selection of Vedic chants and honor them with an priestly title.

A US STATE COURT OF APPEALS has allowed a lawsuit by sixteen Hindus who were unknow-

Making Your Home God's Home

Establish a formal shrine room as the family's place of communion with the Divine through worship and meditation

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

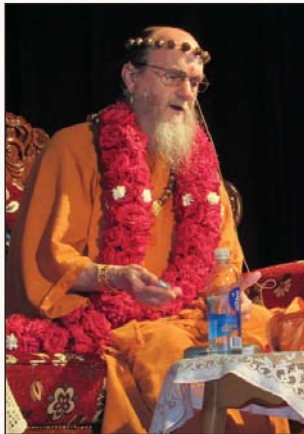
A UNIQUE ASPECT OF HINDUISM IS THAT everyone can be a priest and be in charge of one's own temple. That temple is your home shrine, which you can spiritualize or turn into a mini-temple through conducting daily puja. This process works best when the shrine is a separate room, strictly reserved for worship and meditation, unsullied by worldly talk and other activities. That is the ideal. When that is not possible, it should at least be a quiet corner of a room—more than a simple shelf or closet. Make the shrine a refuge for all family members, a place of peace and solace where they can connect with God and offer their praise, prayers and practical needs.

The late Sri Sri Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Maha Swamiji of Kanchipuram Kamakoti Pitham commented on the necessity of home puja: "Every family must perform puja to Ishvara. Those who find it convenient to do so may conduct elaborate types of puja after receiving proper initiation into them. Others need perform only a brief puja, not lasting more than ten minutes or so. Office goers must offer at least this brief worship. The sacred bell must ring in every home."

Here's a story to show how our efforts to perform puja in the home shrine can start simply and gradually become more elaborate. The Shekhar family always kept a shrine room in their home. Over the years the husband systematically learned more and more about conducting puja. In the beginning he just chanted a simple mantra to Lord Ganesha while waving incense. Then he learned a few more chants and began passing the arati flame at the end of puja. Finally he learned the entire Ganesha Atmartha Puja, which he now does every morning before breakfast. He finds performing the full puja deeply satisfying and notes that it uplifts all members of the family as well. (The Ganesha Atmartha Puja is available with text and audio files at www.himalayanacademy.com/audio/chants/ganesha_puja/.)

About Personal Puja

Many people do not realize it, but personal worship is a fundamental element of what we call Hinduism's Code of Conduct, the yamas and niyamas, or restraints and observances. And this code, comprising steps one and two in ashtanga yoga, is often regarded as the foundation for meditation. Worship, one of the ten niyamas, is known as Ishvarapujana. It refers to puja that we conduct for ourselves rather than the rites done by a priest on our behalf. This worship, performed in the home shrine, can range from simply offering a flower to performing a full and formal puja. Puja conducted by a lay person, called Atmartha Puja, is regarded as a personal worship rite; whereas the public puja held by a priest in a temple is called Parartha Puja. After performing Atmartha Puja, it is customary to sit for



a few minutes in meditation, internal worship, taking in to the soul level the refined feelings, the prana, that the puja has created and which still remains in the room. In this way, we receive maximum benefits from the puja.

My Gurudeva observed that some people are afraid to perform puja. Why? They often feel they lack sufficient training or don't understand the mystical principles behind it well enough. Many Hindus depend on the priests to perform the pujas and sacraments for them. However, Gurudeva points out, as did Maha Swamiji of Kanchipuram, that simple pujas may be performed by anyone wishing to invoke grace from

God, Gods and devas. Love of the Deity is more important than ritualistic perfection. Those wishing to perform advanced Atmartha Puja can receive training and permission to do so through initiation, called diksha, from qualified priests.

Gurudeva placed one important restriction on performing Atmartha Puja: "If a serious outbreak of anger is experienced, one must refrain from doing puja for thirty-one days. Simple waving of incense before the icons is permissible, but not the passing of flames, ringing of bells or the chanting of any mantra, other than the simple recitation of *Aum*."

He invoked this restriction knowing that an angry person would invoke, in the Second World, asuras that can upset us rather than the devas that bring us blessings. In fact, to successfully spiritualize the home, there is a need to minimize expressions of anger, as well as swearing. Take as an analogy assembling a complex jigsaw puzzle. Performing the puja is the equivalent of correctly fitting ten puzzle pieces together. Minor anger takes away five pieces, simple swearing two and a major argument twenty. Clearly, we will never finish the puzzle unless we bring anger and swearing under control. In other words, even the most sincere efforts we put into increasing the spirituality of our home will not succeed if we nullify them with outbursts of anger and swearing.

Keeping in Touch

All Hindus have guardian devas who live on the astral plane and guide, guard and protect their lives. The shrine room is a space for these permanent unseen guests, a room that the whole family can enter and sit in and commune inwardly with these refined beings, who are dedicated to protecting the family, generation after generation. "A token shrine in a bedroom or a closet or a niche in a kitchen is not enough to attract these Divinities," Gurudeva counseled. "One



HINDUISM TODAY

would not host an honored guest in one's closet or have him or her sleep in the kitchen and expect the guest to feel welcome, appreciated and loved."

The most cultured Hindu homes center around the home shrine, a special room set aside and maintained to create a temple-like atmosphere in which we conduct puja, read scripture, perform sadhana, sing bhajans and do japa. This sacred space serves as a solitary refuge, a meditation chamber. It is a safe room in which we retreat from the world, draw into ourselves and get in touch with our superconscious intuition. It is a place to face oneself, to write and burn confessions and make new resolutions. It is a place to dissolve problems in the light of inner knowing with the help of our guardian devas.

You can strengthen the vibration of your home shrine by going to the temple regularly, ideally once a week, and making extra visits during festivals. Lighting an oil lamp in the shrine room when you come home from the temple brings the temple's religious atmosphere into your home. Mystically, that simple act brings devas who were at the temple right into the home shrine, where, from the inner world, they can bless family members and strengthen the home's religious forcefield.

Gurudeva takes the idea of having a separate shrine room in which God and the devas can dwell one step further. He states that cultured and devout Hindus dedicate their entire home to God: "The ideal of Ishvarapujana, worship, is to always be living with God in God's house, which is also your house, and regularly going to God's temple. This lays the foundation for finding God within. How can someone find God within if he doesn't live in God's house as a companion to God in his daily life? The answer is obvious. It would only be a theo-

Worshipping together: Three generations gather in the home shrine for puja. At the conclusion, the father shares prasadam, which all are eager to receive, knowing God has blessed them through this sacrament.

retical pretense, based mainly on egoism."

Hindus who believe in God's presence in their home naturally wish to honor Him, even feed Him. They lovingly place food before His picture, leave, close the door and let God and His devas partake of the meal. Gurudeva observed: "God and the devas do enjoy the food; they do so by absorbing the pranas, the energies, of the food. After the meal is over and everyone has eaten, God's plates are picked up, too. What is left on God's plate is eaten as prasadam, a blessed offering. God is served as much as the hungriest member of the family, not just a token amount. Of course, God, Gods and the devas do not always remain in the shrine room. They wander freely throughout the house, listening to and observing the entire family, guests and friends. Since the family is living in God's house, and God is not living in their house, the voice of God is easily heard as their conscience."

Gurudeva challenges each of us: "The psychology and the decision and the religion is, 'Do we live with God, or does God occasionally visit us?' Who is the authority in the home, an unreligious, ignorant, domineering elder? Or is it God Himself, whom the entire family, including elders, bow down to because they have resigned themselves to the fact that they are living in an ashrama of God? This is religion. This is Ishvarapujana."

LETTERS

Thank You

I was blessed to come across the name of your magazine while Sri Samavedam Shanmukha Sarma was delivering a spiritual lecture on television. I am honored to know of the great, focused efforts of your organization. Please accept my hearty wishes for making efforts to glorify Hindu Dharma.

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The Two Madhvacharyas

I read with fascination the feature about India's great Hindu heritage sites ("World Heritage Sites," Jul/Aug/Sep 2011). These are just the tip of the incredible iceberg that is Hindu architecture and culture. I am delighted to have visited five of these eight sites and intend to see them all. I would like to point out a small error in the section on Hampi. The *kulaguru* of the Vijayanagara kingdom was Sri Vidyaranya, the twelfth Acharya of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham (1380-1386), whose *purvashrama* name was Madhava. While also known as Madhavacharya, he is much more commonly known as Sri Vidyaranya. The confusion arises since the *dvaita* philosopher Sri Madhvacharya was a contemporary. Moreover, the Sringeri Peetham is not a Vaishnava order, as was stated in the article, but follows the Smarta Sampradaya. In fact, the center of worship for the Sringeri *Jagad-gurus* is the crystal Lingam of Lord Chandra-mouliswara (Shiva).

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Hinduism and Homosexuality

After reading both articles ("Guyana's Hindus Face Gay Quandry" and "Beware of Alien Morals," Apr/May/June 2011), I want to say that I particularly agree with a couple statements. The first one was made by Pandit Rajin Balgobind: "Everyone, including homosexual people, should lead disciplined lives that fulfill dharma, contribute to the well being of their society and do no harm to anyone." The article continues, "In Balgobind's opinion, sexual orientation falls into the category of kama (pleasure), one of the four goals of life, called *purusharthas*." The second statement was made by an anonymous man: "Many negative stereotypes of gay and lesbian people lead to prejudices."

Personally, I believe that, regardless of one's sexual orientation, in order to achieve Self Realization one has to renounce physical and worldly pleasures (which include all sexual activities), and that Self Realization will lead

to moksha; if someone is not able to renounce the physical and worldly pleasures, it doesn't mean he/she is a bad person, but it will definitely keep that person from Self Realization in this life. Being a good or bad person, a good or bad Hindu, is not a matter of sexual orientation; I think a good Hindu is that one who is after service, wisdom, Self Realization and moksha. Respect, tolerance and wisdom are key values a good Hindu must possess and put in practice all the time.

RENATO YAMIL CRESPO
MEXICO
VIA FACEBOOK

The Hindu Dharma has a wonderful opportunity to show the world its true enlightened thinking. Other faiths are bound by the black and white dicta of their scriptures. For some, no matter how much they want to be open and affirming, they are held back by verses they believe come straight from the lips of God. The Dharma, when expressed from its summit, allows for many instruments of knowledge to define Truth; including our scriptures, of course, but also the words of our modern day saints and sages, science and our own personal experiences and sense of reason. It is my understanding that much of contemporary Hinduism's less than progressive attitude towards homosexuality stems from the dismal legacy of Muslim and British rule over 800 years. I have read accounts of greater tolerance and appreciation in ancient times. We must reclaim this.

As an actor I have had the gift of many more friendships in the gay community than perhaps most straight people are afforded. Yes, I've seen plenty of examples of what I consider adharmic activity (promiscuity, hedonism, etc.), just as I've seen among the heterosexual community. But I've also seen long-term, loving, monogamous relationships that are inspirational.

One problem with this conversation is that we concentrate too much on the "sex" in homosexual. A committed, loving relationship between two people is so much more than the relatively short time they are actually engaged in sexual activity.

FRED STELLA
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN, USA
VIA FACEBOOK

How to Make Natural Sindoor?

It is difficult it is to find instructions on making natural sindoor at home. There is virtually no information online, no recipes or instructions. The only firm recipe that I could find involves slaked lime (calcium hydroxide), which, if handled improperly, can be very dangerous. There are no instructions avail-

able on how to create purely herbal sindoor. Some flowers are listed, but amounts and methods are never mentioned. Judging from the number of requests for specific instructions on online forums, I am sure that other readers would find the information as helpful as I would.

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Christian Evangelism

I want to bring to everyone's attention a blog post by Nithin Sridhar in which he quotes from a paper entitled "Christian Witness to Hindus" published in 1980 by the Lausanne Movement, listing some of the methods to be implemented to convert Hindus. He begins with an excerpt from the paper: "1) We should enunciate theology in Indian categories so that the Hindu can understand the gospel. 2) We must develop a truly Christian world view consistent with the Indian context. 3) While presenting the gospel, we must be aware of the fact that the Hindu understands the doctrine of God, man, sin and salvation in a way entirely different from the biblical doctrine. 4) Communicate the gospel through indigenous methods such as bhajans, drama, dialogue, discourse, Indian music, festival processions, etc."

Sridhar explains, "Christian missionaries have adopted Hindu ways of life, Hindu religious symbols, architecture, worship forms, and even declare themselves as swamis. A Catholic priest who calls himself swami instantly attains the status and authority of a holy man in Hindu society, which he can use to convert individuals. By using Sanskrit terminology in his sermons, he implies a close relationship of Hindu theology to Catholic theology, a relationship which does not really exist. Such missionaries speak authoritatively on Hindu scriptures and argue that their [Christian] teachings are consonant with everything Hindu, but add a finishing touch, a 'fullness' to the traditional faith.

"Swami Jayendra, Sankaracharya of Kanchi Matham, made a valid point at the 'Interfaith Dialogue' with Cardinal Jean-Louis Pierre Tauran, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, and others, in Mumbai on 12 July 2009. In a statement released to the media, he said: 'The Church in India must stop forthwith the use of Hindu religious words, phrases and symbols like *Veda*, *Agama*, *rishi*, *ashram*, *Om* and other such in what is referred to as 'inculturation' tactics, but which are only intended to deceive the vulnerable sections of our people who are the intended targets for religious conversion.'" Sridhar concludes, "Christianity

has always followed a policy of 'inculturation.' It adopted Pagan elements in Christianized form to pave the way for transition from Paganism to Christianity in Europe. Pagan gods became Christian saints, and Pagan festivals became Christian festivals. In this process of inculturation, the Christian Church suborned old forms to its new message, making sure that the [Greek and Roman] Pagan foundation was submerged under Christian doctrine." Please read more of Sridhar's article, "Inculturation: Fooling the Hindu Masses," at <http://bit.ly/inculturation>.

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Catholic Murtis in Temples

I am very saddened to see a Catholic nun's *murti* in the Shree Sanatan Hindu Mandir in Wembley, UK ("New Temple's Unusual Icon," Global Dharma, Oct/Nov/Dec 2010). The management should take a very bold step to remove it. Otherwise, I would advise Hindus to boycott that temple. It is a shame that Hindus don't stand up for their religion. This is a tactical process to convert Hindus to Christianity. After 100 years or so a stamp will be issued by the UK government showing Hindus worshiping Catholic icons, implying that they have converted to Catholicism. It has happen before with an image of Mary carrying baby Krishna.

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Why Were Animals Sacrificed?

I am a Hindu and have been vegetarian my whole life, as I was born into the tradition, and I believe it is not right to kill another animal. I have recently taken up study of the *Veda* and have discovered there are sacrifices of animals prescribed. How would you account for this?

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It is a controversial subject, and we invite our readers to comment.

Blood Attracts Asuras

You cite Hindu scriptures as teaching that blood attracts asuras, low-minded spirits, in "Women Barge their Way into Temple Sanctum" (Hindu Press International, April 14, 2011). Could you give a specific reference?

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According to Agama scholar Dr. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar, the Amsumat Agama's chapter on expiatory rites directs: "Devotees or priests should desist from entering the temple if their bodies have been wounded or blood is oozing out of their bodies. There are good forces (saumya saktayah) and evil forces (dussaktayah), being invisible to humans, pervading around. The blood is highly instantaneous in attracting such evil forces,

asuras, rakshasas. The presence of such evil forces would nullify the benefits of puja, fire rituals, mantra japa and expiatory rites."

Corrections

In "Giants Who Reawakened Indian Dance" (Apr/May/June 2011) by Kusum Joshi, the name given for Uday Shankar's father was incorrect. His father's name was Shyam Shankar.

The Sanskrit word printed at the end of Digital Dharma in our Apr/May/June 2011 issue was improperly formed due to a font error. It should read शुभमस्तु

In Chapter 4 of our Hindu history lesson series, "India as Colony: 1850-1947" (Apr/May/June 2010), the 1909 map used in the lesson is misleading, showing a dotted red line around Nepal, as if it was part of British India. In the map's legend, it accurately states that areas in yellow (which includes Nepal) were "Native States and Territories," i.e., independent of British India. Nepal has never been under foreign rule.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

Life's Richest Opportunity: Giving

Even better: giving via endowments

HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT (HHE) has a treasure to share with you and the world today: its newly redesigned website at www.hheonline.org. It has already proved helpful to donors, potential donors and people curious to know more about endowments, estate planning and planned giving.

The site will remind you of HINDUISM TODAY for its simplicity, clarity, relevance and inspiration. It gives quick, trenchant overviews, illustrating ways of giving with numerous examples and personal accounts. It contains an Estate Planning Toolkit and shows you how to set up an endowment for your favorite charity anywhere in the world—the whole made amazingly easy by HHE, with no fees involved. The website is a marvelous tool for shaping one's legacy, which can bring satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment and joy.

In 2006, Mrunal and Padmaja Patel of Texas purchased a life insurance policy and named the Hinduism Today Production Fund (one of HHE's 83 funds) as one of its beneficiaries. "HINDUISM TODAY changed our lives," explains Dr. Patel. "We wanted to do something significant in return. It has been fulfilling for our family, proving that what you give will come back to you abundantly in one way or another."

If you would like to support HINDUISM TODAY and give yourself and your family a measure of fulfillment in the process, please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund with an immediate gift or by including the fund in your estate plan. Read about the fund at www.hheonline.org/productionfund. Subscribe to the Production Fund e-newsletter at: www.gurudeva.org/email-news. Call 1-808-634-5407 or email hhe@hindu.org.



The Patel family: "Rather than waiting until later in life, we acted when the opportunity, the inspiration and the means were all there." Above, HHE's newly designed home page.

QUOTES & QUIPS

It is my ambition to conquer the world by Hindu thought.

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902)

If you accept Parabrahman, you must accept Shakti. They are like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognize its power. You cannot conceive of the Sun's rays without the Sun, nor can you conceive of the Sun without its rays. One cannot think of the Absolute without the relative, or of the relative without the Absolute. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

Though my voice is feeble, Truth will be heard. Truth alone will endure; all else will be swept away before the tide of time. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948)

Give! Give! Give without any expectation of reward. Give the best in you! **Dada Vaswani**, leader of the *Sadhu Vaswani Mission*

All things are good when we master them, but no thing is good when it masters us. **Swami Panchadasi** (1862–1932)

The unchangeable can only be realized in silence. Once realised, it will deeply affect the changeable, itself remaining unaffected. This attitude of silent observation is the very foundation of yoga. You see the picture, but you are not the picture. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981), *Hindu sage*

If all the land were turned to paper and all the seas turned to ink, and all the forests into pens to write with, they would still not suffice to describe the greatness of the guru. **Kabir** (1440–1518), *Indian Saint*

If Indians had remained unknown to the Tartars and to us (Europeans), they would have been the happiest people in the world. **Voltaire** (1694–1778) *French Enlightenment writer, historian and philosopher*

In the valley and on the mountain
—only God I saw.
In prayer and fasting, in praise and

contemplation
—only God I saw.
Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance, qualities nor causes
—only God I saw.
Like a candle I was melting in His fire: amidst the flames incandescent
—only God I saw.
I saw myself with my own eyes most clearly, but when I looked with God's eyes
—only God I saw.
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished, and lo! I was the All-living
—only God I saw.
Baba Kuhi, 11th-century Sufi mystic

Two silk worms had a race.
They ended up in a tie.

It's always wrong before it's right.
Chuck Close, American painter

If eternity means not infinite temporal

they acquires various nutrients—with no detriment to other plants. Flowers (*photo below*) and fruit are produced after three years, and viable seeds after five.

Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote,

*The sandal tree as if to prove,
How sweet to conquer hate, love,
Perfumes the axe that lays it low.*



WIKIMEDIA

DID YOU KNOW?

Sacred Sandalwood

SANDALWOOD IS A REVERED TREE IN HINDU TRADITION. THE fragrant oil of the *Santalum album* has been used for medicinal and religious since Vedic times. Fragrant sandalwood paste is used for *pujas* and in sectarian marks. It makes one of the most popular types of incense. The oil extracted from sandalwood is a stimulant and an antiseptic, used through the centuries as a cure for gastric ailments and skin problems.

Indian sandalwood is named in the *Saiva Agamas* as the preferred sacred wood for building temples. Alas, though the scripture recommends the propagation of more sandalwood tree before felling a tree, making sure that at least five saplings are viable, this practice has not been followed by those who fell this precious tree only for its oil or other prized uses. As a result, it is now a threatened species. Indian laws protect the trees, granting ownership to the government.

Santalum album trees may live to be a hundred years. When young, they engage in a well-mannered parasitism. By intertwining their roots with nearby trees, a process called *haustorium*,

duration, but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present. **Ludwig Wittgenstein** (1889–1951), *Austrian philosopher*

The secret for having a successful team is to lead, rather than to manage.

You need to be a great theist before you can become a great monist. Theistic practices of humility, service and worship form the basis of yoga, which then leads to levels of samadhi and monistic realizations. It is a ladder with definite, clear steps. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of *HINDUISM TODAY*

Nothing is lost, nothing is gained. There is nothing. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami**, (1872–1964) *Sri Lankan mystic*

Our nerve system is just like a harp. It can be played by us or by other people. Others can cause many tones to be heard in our nerve system; that is why it is imperative for those on the path to be in good company. But we want it to be played from the inside out through the beautiful rhythm of superconsciousness—which is bliss. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of *HINDUISM TODAY*



IVAN CAMILLI

Oh, no, thanks. I was already born again, thousands and thousands of times!

BASICS OF HINDUISM

Festivals

FESTIVALS ARE SPECIAL TIMES OF COMMUNION WITH GOD and Gods, of family and community sharing. Hindus observe numerous festivals in the temple and the home, and special holy days each week and month.

These are also auspicious and sacred days of sadhana, fasting, meditation, worship and retreat from worldly concerns.

It is through festivals that most Hindus experience their religion. The devout Hindu knows these are times of profound mysticism, when God and the Gods touch our world, revitalize our souls, lighten karmas and bless our families. Yet festivals do even more than this: they are essential to the perpetuation of religion, periodically reigniting the spark of zeal and devotion in the community. They provide the spiritual public square where Hindus interrelate with one another.

Each state of India, indeed each village, lends a little of its unique culture to how festivals are celebrated, creating almost endless variations.

The major temple festivals are Mahasivaratri, Krishna Jayanti, Ramnavami and Navaratri. There are also home, community

and national celebrations that are also important, most notably Diwali, Holi and Hindu New Year. The Kumbha Melas, perhaps the grandest of all, happen every few years based on astrological calculations.

The *Rig Veda* says, "Let us now invoke for our aid the the Designer of all things that are, the inspirer of wisdom! May He, the ever-kindly, be well disposed to our summons, and may He, whose work is goodness, grant us His blessing!"



DREAMSTIME

14 Questions People Ask About Hinduism

...and 14 tweetable answers!



PIETER WELTEVREDE

Cow Worship, Cremation, Caste, Many Gods, Karma, Reincarnation, Idols, Yoga & More

Humanity's most profound faith is now a global phenomenon. Students, teachers, neighbors and friends are full of questions. Misconceptions run rampant. Here are fourteen thoughtful answers you can use to set the record straight.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN PUT ON THE SPOT WITH A PROVOCATIVE question about Hinduism, even one that really shouldn't be so hard to answer? If so, you are not alone. It takes some good preparation and a little attitude adjustment to confidently field queries on your faith—be they from friendly co-workers, students, passersby or especially from Christian evangelists. Back in the spring of 1990, a group of teens from the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont, sent a request to HINDUISM TODAY for "official answers" to nine questions they were commonly asked by their peers. These questions had perplexed the Hindu youth themselves; and their parents had no convincing answers. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami took up the challenge and provided the following answers to the nine questions. Perusing the list for this edition of the magazine, we thought it crucial to add a tenth dialog on caste, since that is the most relentless criticism Hinduism faces today.

Let's begin with advice on the attitudes to hold when responding. First, ask yourself, "Who is asking the question?" Millions of people are sincerely interested in Hinduism and the many Asian religions. So, when asked about Hinduism, don't be defensive, even if the questioner seems confrontational. Instead, assume that the person really wants to learn. Of course, some only want to harass, badger and turn you to their view. If you sense this is the case, feel free to smile and courteously dismiss yourself without any attempt to answer, lest you simply add fuel to his fires.

Bearing this in mind, it is still best never to answer a question about religion too boldly or too immediately. That might lead to confrontation. Offer a prologue first, then come to the question, guiding the inquirer toward understanding. Your poise and deliberateness gives assurance that you know what you are talking about. It also gives you a moment to think and draw on your intuitive knowing. Before going deeply into an answer, always ask the questioner what his religion is. Knowing that, you can address his particular frame of mind and make your answer most relevant. Another key: have confidence in yourself and your ability to give a meaningful and polite response. Even to say "I am sorry. I still have much to learn about my religion and I don't yet know the answer to that" is a meaningful answer. Honesty is always appreciated. Never be afraid to admit what you don't know, for this lends credibility to what you do know.

Here are four prologues that can be used, according to the situation, before you begin to actually answer a question. 1) "I am really pleased that you are interested in my religion. You may not know that one out of every six people in the world is a Hindu." 2) "Many

people have asked me about my tradition. I don't know everything, but I will try to answer your question." 3) "First, you should know that in Hinduism, it is not only belief and intellectual understanding that is important. Hindus place the greatest value on experiencing each of these truths personally." 4) The fourth type of prologue is to repeat the question to see if the person has actually stated what he wants to know. Repeat the question in your own words and ask if you have understood his query correctly. If it's a complicated question, you might begin by saying, "Philosophers have spent lifetimes discussing and pondering questions such as this, but I will do my best to explain."

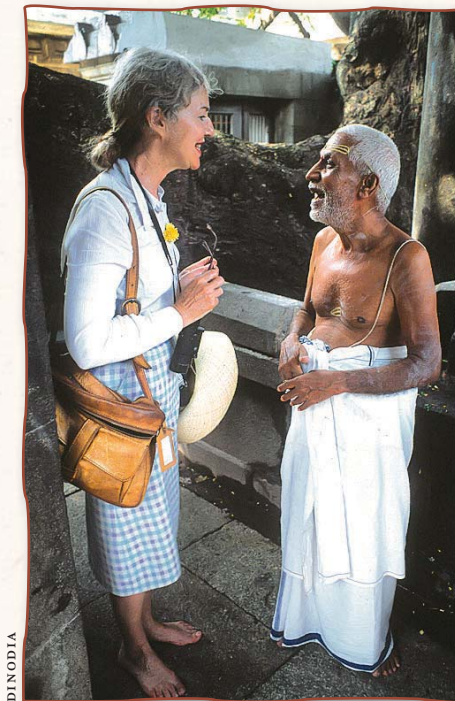
Have courage. Speak from your inner mind. Sanatana Dharma is an experiential path, not a dogma, so your experience in answering questions will help your own spiritual unfoldment. You will learn from your answers if you listen to your inner mind speak. This can actually be a lot of fun. The attentive teacher always learns more than the student.

After the prologue, address the question without hesitation. If the person is sincere, you can ask, "Do you have any other questions?" If he wants to know more, then elaborate as best you can. Use easy, everyday examples. Share what enlightened souls and scriptures of Hinduism have said on the subject. Remember, we must not assume that someone who asks about Hinduism is insincere or is challenging our faith. Many are just being friendly or making conversation to get to know you; others, having reincarnated into a strange culture, are searching for the way back "home." So don't be on the defensive or take it all too seriously. Smile when you give your response. Be open. If the second or third question is on something you know nothing about, you can say, "I don't know. But if you'd like, I will find out and email you

what I find out." Smile and have confidence as you give these answers. Don't be shy. Your birth karmas ensure that nobody can ask you a question to which you are unable to provide a fine answer that will fully satisfy the seeker. You may make lifelong friends in this way.

In the following pages, each question is addressed by a short response that can be committed to memory, a longer answer, and a detailed explanation. Many questioners will be content with the short, simple answer, so start with that first. Use the explanation as background information for yourself, or as a contingency response in case you end up in a deeper philosophical discussion.

To order additional copies of this Educational Insight and other Hindu literature, email: pamphlets@hindu.org. Additional resources can be found at: www.himalayanacademy.com/basics/.



A visitor to India questions an elder about temple ceremonies and customs

1

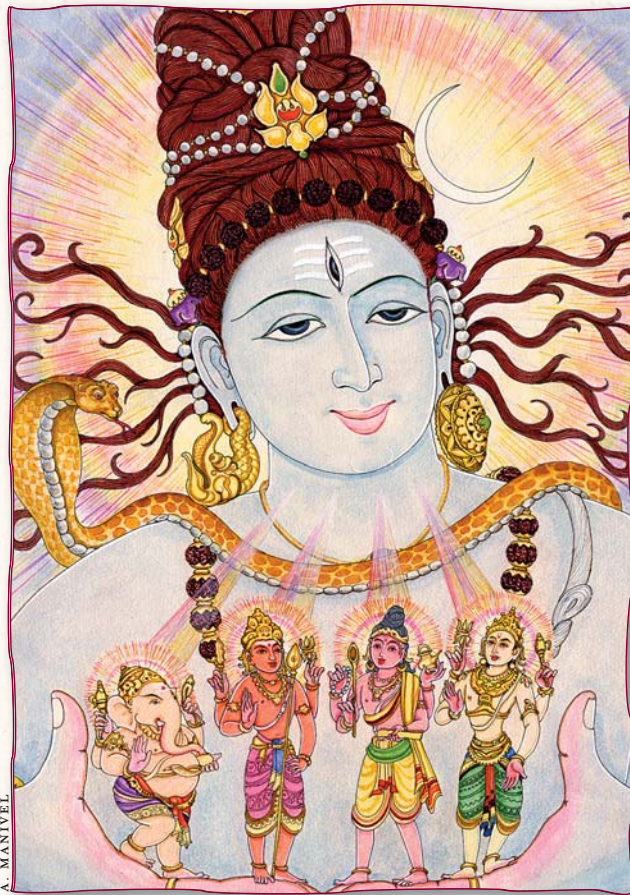
Why does Hinduism have so many Gods?

Hindus all believe in one Supreme God who created the universe. He is all-pervasive. He created many Gods, highly advanced spiritual beings, to be His helpers.

CONTRARY TO PREVAILING misconceptions, Hindus all worship a one Supreme Being, though by different names. This is because the peoples of India with different languages and cultures have understood the one God in their own distinct way. Through history there arose four principal Hindu denominations—Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Smartas—who see all Deities as reflections of the One God—the choice of Deity is left to the devotee. This liberal Smarta perspective is well known, but it is not the prevailing Hindu view. Due to this diversity, Hindus are profoundly tolerant of other religions, respecting the fact that each has its own pathway to the one God.

One of the unique understandings in Hinduism is that God is not far away, living in a remote heaven, but is inside each and every soul, in the heart and consciousness, waiting to be discovered. This knowing that God is always with us gives us hope and courage. Knowing the One Great God in this intimate and experiential way is the goal of Hindu spirituality.

Elaboration: Hinduism is both monotheistic and henotheistic. Hindus were never polytheistic, in the sense that there are many equal Gods. Henotheism (literally “one God”) better defines the Hindu view. It means the worship of one God without denying the existence of other Gods. We Hindus believe in the one all-pervasive God who energizes the entire universe. We can see Him in the life shining out of the eyes of humans and all creatures. This view of God as existing in and giving life to all things is called panentheism. It is different from pantheism, which is the belief that God is



Hindus all worship the One Supreme God, called by various names, depending on their denomination, and they revere a multitude of angelic beings, which they call Gods. Above, the central figure is Lord Siva, worshiped as the Supreme Being by Saivites and many other Hindus. Cradled in His hands are other great beings, known as Gods, including Lord Ganesha.

the natural universe and nothing more. It is also different from strict theism which says God is only above the world, apart and transcendent. Panentheism is an all-encompassing concept. It says that God is both in the world and beyond it, both immanent and transcendent. That is the highest Hindu view.

Hindus also believe in many Gods who perform various functions, like executives in a large corporation. These should not be confused with the Supreme God. These Divinities are highly advanced beings who have specific duties and powers—not unlike the heavenly spirits, overlords or archangels revered in other faiths. Each denomination worships the Supreme God and its own pantheon of divine beings.

What is sometimes confusing to non-Hindus is that Hindus of various sects may call the one God by many different names, according to their denomination or regional tradition. Truth for the Hindu has many names, but that does not make for many truths. Hinduism gives us the freedom to approach God in our own way, encouraging a multiplicity of paths, not asking for conformity to just one.

There is much confusion about this subject, even among Hindus. Learn the right terms and the subtle differences in them, and

you can explain the profound ways Hindus look at Divinity. Others will be delighted with the richness of the Indian concepts of God. You may wish to mention that some Hindus believe only in the formless Absolute Reality as God; others believe in God as personal Lord and Creator. This freedom makes the understanding of God in Hinduism, the oldest living religion, the richest in all of Earth's existing faiths.

2

Do Hindus believe in reincarnation?

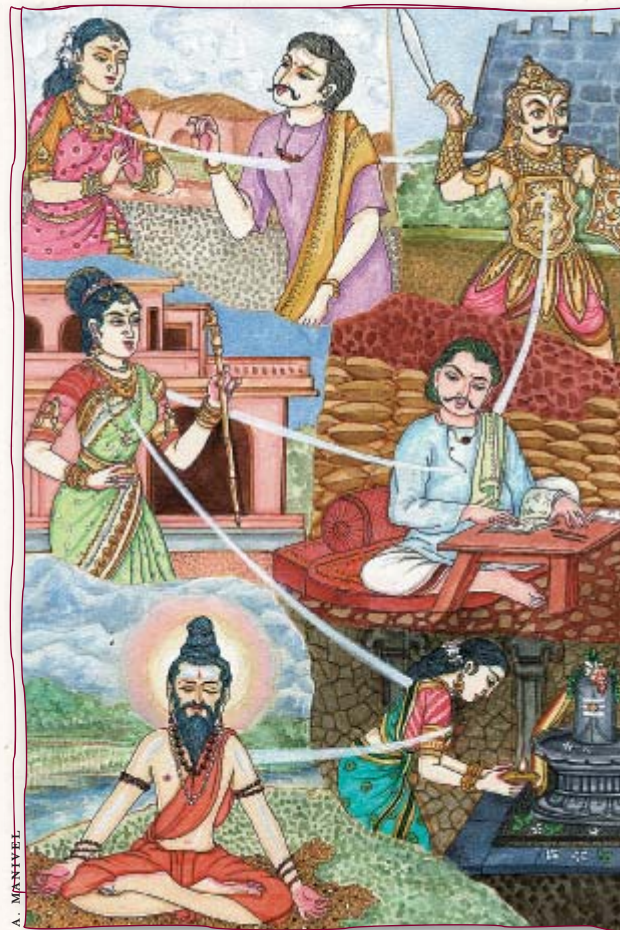
Yes, we believe the soul is immortal and takes birth time and time again. Through this process, we have experiences, learn lessons and evolve spiritually. Finally we graduate from physical birth.

CARNATE MEANS “OF FLESH,” and *reincarnate* means to “reenter the flesh.” Yes, Hindus believe in reincarnation. To us, it explains the natural way the soul evolves from immaturity to spiritual illumination. Life and death are realities for all of us. Hinduism believes that the soul is immortal, that it never dies, but inhabits one body after another on the Earth during its evolutionary journey. Like the caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly, physical death is a most natural transition for the soul, which survives and, guided by karma, continues its long pilgrimage until it is one with God.

I myself have had many lives before this one and expect to have more. Finally, when I have it all worked out and all the lessons have been learned, I will attain enlightenment and moksha, liberation. This means I will still exist, but will no longer be pulled back to be born in a physical body.

Even modern science is discovering reincarnation. There have been many cases of individuals' remembering their past lives. These have been researched by scientists, psychiatrists and parapsychologists during the past decades and documented in good books and videos. Young children speak of vivid past-life memories, which fade as they grow older, as the veils of individuality shroud the soul's intuitive understanding. Great mystics speak of their past lives as well. So do our ancient scriptures, the *Vedas*, reveal the reality of reincarnation.

Reincarnation is believed in by the Jains and the Sikhs, by the Indians of the Americas, and by the Buddhists, certain Jewish sects, the Pagans and the many indigenous faiths. Even Christianity originally taught reincarnation, but formally renounced it in the twelfth century. It is, in fact, one of the widest held articles of faith



Each soul evolves by experiencing many varied lives through reincarnation, called punarjanma in Sanskrit, the process wherein the soul repeatedly takes on a physical body through being born on Earth. Here, a soul, represented by the ray of light, is shown in seven successive lives. Reincarnation is a purposeful maturing process governed by the law of karma.

on planet Earth.

Elaboration: At death the soul leaves the physical body. But the soul does not die. It lives on in a subtle body called the astral body. The astral body exists in the non-physical dimension called the astral plane, which is also the world we are in during our dreams at night when we sleep. Here we continue to have experiences until we are reborn again in another physical body as a baby. Each reincarnating soul chooses a home and a family which can best fulfill its next step of learning and maturation.

After many lifetimes of following dharma, the soul is fully matured in love, wisdom and knowledge of God. There is no longer a need for physical birth, for all lessons have been learned, all karmas fulfilled. That soul is then liberated, freed from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Evolution then continues in the more refined spiritual worlds.

Similarly, after we graduate from elementary school we never have to go back to the fifth grade. We have gone beyond that level in understanding. Thus, life's ultimate goal is not money, not clothes, not sex, not power, not food or any other of the instinctive needs. These are natural pursuits, but our real purpose on this Earth is to know, to love and to serve God and the Gods. That leads to the rare and priceless objects of life: enlightenment and liberation.

This Hindu view of the soul's evolution answers many otherwise bewildering questions, removing the fear of death while giving assurance that each soul is evolving toward the same spiritual destiny, for the Hindu believes that karma and reincarnation are leading every single soul to God Realization.

4

Why do Hindus worship the cow?

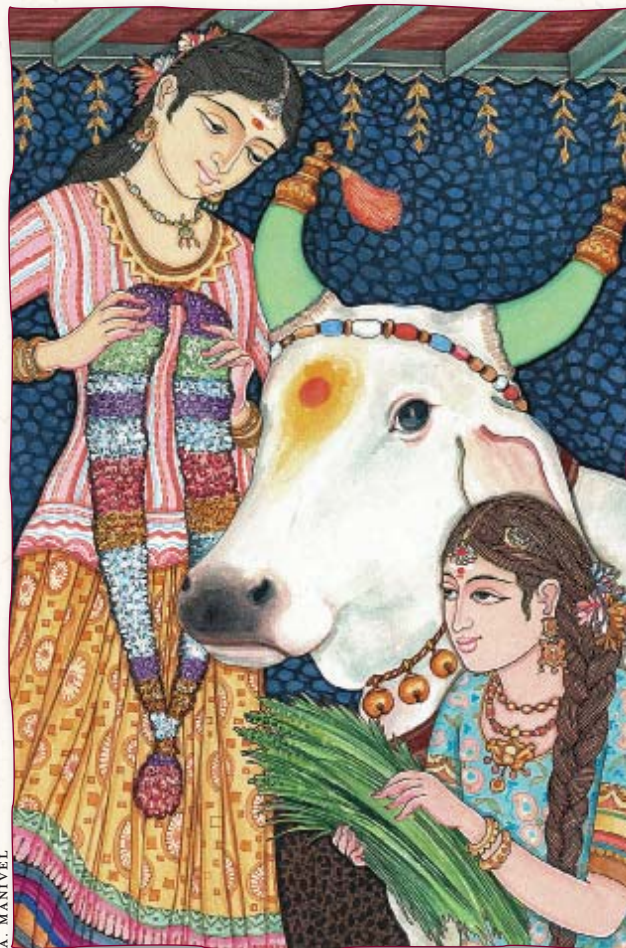
Hindus don't worship cows. We respect, honor and adore the cow. By honoring this gentle animal, who gives more than she takes, we honor all creatures.

HINDUS REGARD ALL LIVING creatures as sacred—mammals, fishes, birds and more. We acknowledge this reverence for life in our special affection for the cow. At festivals we decorate and honor her, but we do not worship her in the sense that we worship the Deity.

To the Hindu, the cow symbolizes all other creatures. The cow is a symbol of the Earth, the nourisher, the ever-giving, undemanding provider. The cow represents life and the sustenance of life. The cow is so generous, taking nothing but water, grass and grain. It gives and gives and gives of its milk, as does the liberated soul give of his spiritual knowledge. The cow is so vital to life, the virtual sustainer of life, for many humans. The cow is a symbol of grace and abundance. Veneration of the cow instills in Hindus the virtues of gentleness, receptivity and connectedness with nature.

Elaboration: Who is the greatest giver on planet Earth today? Who do we see on every table in every country of the world—breakfast, lunch and dinner? It is the cow. McDonald's cow-vending golden arches and their rivals have made fortunes on the humble cow. The generous cow gives milk and cream, yogurt and cheese, butter and ice cream, ghee and buttermilk. It gives entirely of itself through sirloin, ribs, rump, porterhouse and beef stew. Its bones are the base for soup broths and glues. It gives the world leather belts, leather seats, leather coats and shoes, beef jerky, cowboy hats—you name it.

The only cow question for Hindus is, "Why don't more people respect and protect this remarkable creature?" Mahatma Gandhi



Hindus do not worship cows, but they do revere them as the perfect example of Divinity in all forms of life. Here a girl garlands a cow whose horns are painted and adorned with brass tips and tassels. Her sister offers fresh grass. In India, the cow is honored, adored and protected as a symbol of wealth, strength, abundance, selfless giving and a full Earthly life.

once said, "One can measure the greatness of a nation and its moral progress by the way it treats its animals. Cow protection to me is not mere protection of the cow. It means protection of all that lives and is helpless and weak in the world. The cow means the entire subhuman world."

In the Hindu tradition, the cow is honored, garlanded and given special feedings at festivals all over India, most importantly the annual Gopashtama festival. Demonstrating how dearly Hindus love their cows, colorful cow jewelry and clothing is sold at fairs all over the Indian countryside. From a young age, Hindu children are taught to decorate the cow with garlands, paint and ornaments. Her nature is epitomized in Kamadhenu, the divine, wish-fulfilling cow. The cow and her sacred gifts—milk and ghee in particular—are essential elements in Hindu worship, penance and rites of passage. In India, more than 3,000 institutions called Gaushalas, maintained by charitable trusts, care for old and infirm cows. And while many Hindus are not vegetarians, most respect the still widely held code of abstaining from eating beef.

By her docile, tolerant nature, the cow exemplifies the cardinal virtue of Hinduism, noninjury, known as *ahimsa*. The cow also symbolizes dignity, strength, endurance, maternity and selfless service. In the *Vedas*, cows represent wealth and joyous Earthly life. From the *Rig Veda* (4.28.1:6) we read. "The cows have come and have brought us good fortune. In our stalls, contented, may they stay! May they bring forth calves for us, many-colored, giving milk for Indra each day. You make, O cows, the thin man sleek; to the unlovely you bring beauty. Rejoice

3

What is karma?

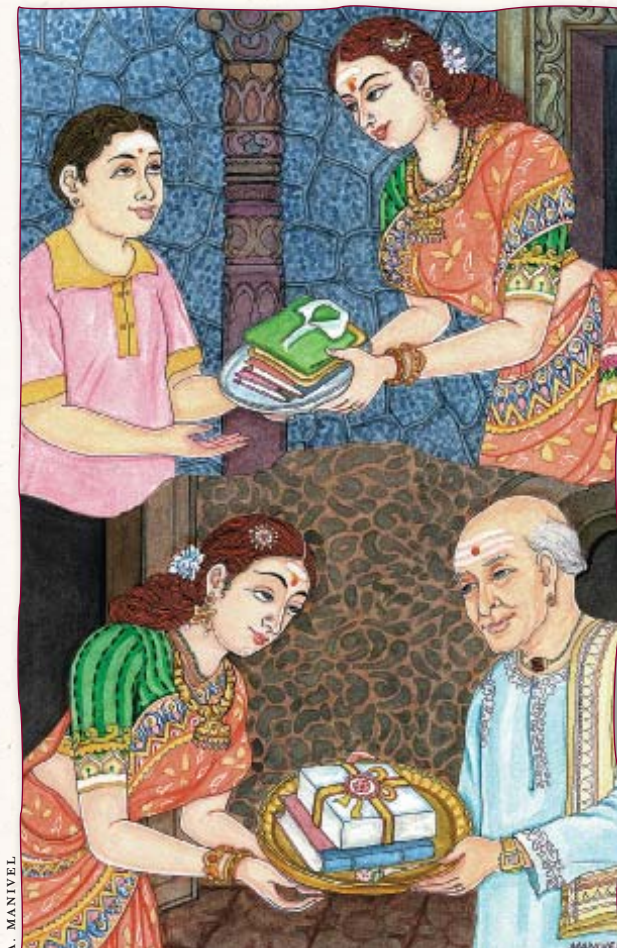
Karma is the universal principle of cause and effect. Our actions, both good and bad, come back to us in the future, helping us to learn from life's lessons and become better people.

KARMA IS ONE OF THE NATURAL laws of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. Just as God created gravity to bring order to the physical world, He created karma as a divine system of justice that is self-governing and infinitely fair. It automatically creates the appropriate future experience in response to the current action. *Karma* simply means "action" or "cause and effect." When something happens to us that is apparently unfortunate or unjust, it is not God punishing us. It is the result of our own past actions.

The *Vedas*, Hinduism's revealed scripture, tell us if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Thus we create our own destiny through thought and action. And the divine law is: whatever karma we are experiencing in our life is just what we need at the moment, and nothing can happen but that we have the strength to meet it. Even harsh karma, when faced in wisdom, can be the greatest catalyst for spiritual growth. Understanding the way karma works, we seek to live a good and virtuous life through right thought, right speech and right action. This is called *dharma*.

Elaboration: Karma is basically energy. I throw energy out through thoughts, words and deeds, and it comes back to me, in time, through other people. Karma is our best teacher, for we must always face the consequences of our actions and thus improve and refine our behavior, or suffer if we do not. We Hindus look at time as a circle, as things cycle around again. Professor Einstein came to the same conclusion. He saw time as a curve, and space as well. This would eventually make a circle.

Karma is a very just law which, like gravity, treats everyone the



One of the best examples of karma is that you can't give anything away but that generosity will return to you, with interest. Here, in the upper scene, a lady gives clothing to a youth. Below, she receives an unexpected gift from a neighbor as the karma of her good deed brings its natural reward. By wisely heeding karma's ways, we tread the path of dharma.

same. Because we Hindus understand karma, we do not hate or resent people who do us harm. We understand they are giving back the effects of the causes we set in motion at an earlier time. The law of karma puts man at the center of responsibility for everything he does and everything that is done to him.

Karma is a word we hear quite often on television. "This is my karma," or "It must have been something I did in a past life to bring such good karma to me." We hear karma simply defined as "What goes around, comes around." In some schools of Hinduism, karma is looked upon as something bad—perhaps because we are most aware of this law when we are facing difficult karma, and not so aware of it when life is going smoothly. Even some Hindus equate karma with sin, and this is what evangelical Christians preach that it means. Many people believe that karma means "fate," a preordained destiny over which one has no control, which is also untrue.

The process of action and reaction on all levels—physical, mental and spiritual—is karma. Here is an example. I say kind words to you, and you feel peaceful and happy. I say harsh words to you, and you become ruffled and upset. The kindness and the harshness will return to me, through others, at a later time. This is karma. An architect thinks creative, productive thoughts while drawing plans for a new building.

But were he to think destructive, unproductive thoughts, he would soon not be able to accomplish any kind of positive task even if he desired to do so. This is karma, a natural law of the mind. We must also be very careful about our thoughts, because thought creates, and thoughts make karmas—good, bad and mixed.

5

Are Hindus idol worshipers?

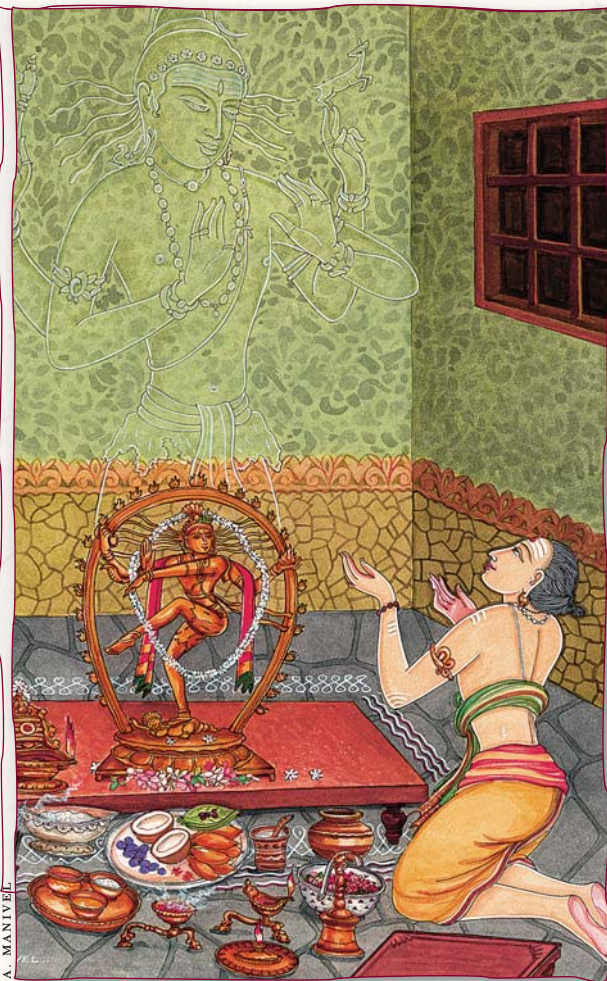
Hindus do not worship a stone or metal “idol” as God. We worship God through the image. We invoke the presence of God from the higher, unseen worlds, into the image so that we can commune with Him and receive His blessings.

THE STONE OR METAL DEITY images in Hindu temples and shrines are not mere symbols of the Gods. They are the form through which their love, power and blessings flood forth into this world. We may liken this mystery to our ability to communicate with others through the telephone. We do not talk to the telephone; rather we use it as a means of communication with another person. Without the telephone, we could not converse across long distances; and without the sanctified icon in the temple, we cannot easily commune with the Deity.

Divinity can also be invoked and felt in a sacred fire, or in a tree, or in the enlightened person of a *satguru*. In our temples, God is invoked in the sanctum by highly trained priests. Through the practice of yoga, or meditation, we invoke God inside ourself. *Yoga* means to yoke oneself to God within. The image or icon of worship is a focus for our prayers and devotions.

Another way to explain icon worship is to acknowledge that Hindus believe God is everywhere, in all things, whether stone, wood, creatures or people. So, it is not surprising that they feel comfortable worshipping the Divine in His material manifestation. The Hindu can see God in stone and water, fire, air and ether, and inside his own soul. Indeed, there are Hindu temples which have in the sanctum sanctorum no image at all but a yantra, a symbolic or mystic diagram. However, the sight of the image enhances the devotee's worship.

Elaboration: In Hinduism one of the ultimate attainments is when the seeker transcends the need of all form and symbol. This is the yogi's goal. In this way Hinduism is the least idol-oriented of all the religions of the world. There is no religion that is more



A devotee looks within and beyond the bronze dancing Siva to behold God in His spiritual body of light. Dressed in traditional Hindu garb, the man is performing his daily puja in his home shrine—chanting Sanskrit mantras, offering fruit, water, flowers, incense and light—worshipping devoutly, beseeching God to send blessings through the enshrined image.

aware of the transcendent, timeless, formless, causeless Truth. Nor is there any religion which uses more symbols to represent Truth in preparation for that realization.

Humorously speaking, Hindus are not idle worshipers. I have never seen a Hindu worship in a lazy or idle way. They worship with great vigor and devotion, with unstinting regularity and constancy. There's nothing idle about our ways of worship! (A little humor never hurts.) But, of course, the question is about “graven images.”

All religions have their symbols of holiness through which the sacred flows into the mundane. To name a few: the Christian cross, or statues of Mother Mary and Saint Theresa, the holy Kaaba in Mecca, the Sikh *Adi Granth* enshrined in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Arc and Torah of the Jews, the image of a meditating Buddha, the totems of indigenous and Pagan faiths, and the artifacts of the holy men and women of all religions. Such icons, or graven images, are held in awe by the followers of the respective faiths. The question is, does this make all such religionists idol worshipers? The answer is, yes and no. From our perspective, idol worship is an intelligent, mystical practice shared by all of the world's great faiths.

The human mind releases itself from suffering through the use of forms and symbols that awaken reverence, evoke sanctity and spiritual wisdom. Even a funda-

mentalist Christian who rejects all forms of idol worship, including those of the Catholic and Episcopal churches, would resent someone who showed disrespect for his Bible. This is because he considers it sacred. His book and the Hindu's icon are much alike in this way.

6

Are Hindus forbidden to eat meat?

Hindus teach vegetarianism as a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. But in today's world not all Hindus are vegetarians.

OUR RELIGION DOES NOT lay down rigid “do's and don'ts.” There are no commandments. Hinduism gives us the wisdom to make up our own mind on what we put in our body, for it is the only one we have—in this life, at least. Vegetarians are more numerous in the South of India than in the North. This is because of the North's cooler climactic conditions and past Islamic influence. Priests and religious leaders are definitely vegetarian, so as to maintain a high level of purity and spiritual consciousness to fulfill their responsibilities, and to awaken the refined areas of their nature. Soldiers and law-enforcement officers are generally not vegetarians, because they have to keep alive their aggressive forces in order to perform their work. To practice yoga and be successful in meditation, it is mandatory to be vegetarian. It is a matter of wisdom—the application of knowledge at any given moment. Today, about twenty percent of all Hindus are vegetarians.

Elaboration: This can be a touchy subject. There are several ways to respond, depending on who is asking and the background in which he was raised. But the overlying principle that defines the Hindu answer to this query is *ahimsa*—refraining from injuring, physically, mentally or emotionally, anyone or any living creature. The Hindu who wishes to strictly follow the path of noninjury naturally adopts a vegetarian diet. It's a matter of conscience more than anything else.

When we eat meat, fish, fowl and eggs, we absorb the vibration of the instinctive creatures into our nerve system. This chemically alters our consciousness and amplifies our lower nature, which is prone to fear, anger, jealousy, confusion, resentment and the like.



Vendors at a market are selling fruits, vegetables, grains, spices and sweets—a potpourri of foods that great cooks creatively combine in one of the world's most sumptuous cuisines. Hindus understand the sound reasons against eating meat, and many abstain entirely. With such a savory and healthy diet, there is no need to consume flesh.

Many Hindu swamis advise followers to be well-established vegetarians prior to initiation into mantra, and to remain vegetarian thereafter. But most do not insist upon vegetarianism for those not seeking initiation. Swamis have learned that families who are vegetarian have fewer problems than those who are not.

Poignant scriptural citations counsel against eating meat. The *Yajur Veda* (36.18) calls for kindness toward all creatures living on the Earth, in the air and in the water. The *Tirukural*, a 2,200-year-old masterpiece of ethics, states, “When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he will abstain from eating it” (257). The *Manu Dharma Shastras* state, “Having well considered the origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let one entirely abstain from eating flesh,” and “When the diet is pure, the mind and heart are pure.” For guidance in this and all matters, Hindus also rely on their own guru, community elders, their own conscience and their knowledge of the benefits of abstaining from meat and enjoying a wholesome vegetarian diet. Of course, there are good Hindus who eat meat, and there are not-so-good Hindus who are vegetarians.

Today in America and Europe millions of people are vegetarians

because they want to live a long time and be healthy. Many feel a moral obligation to shun the mentality of violence to which meat-eating gives rise. There are good books on vegetarianism, such as *Diet for a New America*. There is also a fine magazine called *Vegetarian Times*. The booklet “How to Win an Argument with a Meat-Eater” is online at: www.himalayanacademy.com/books/pamphlets/WinMeatEaterArgument.html.

7 Do Hindus have a Bible?

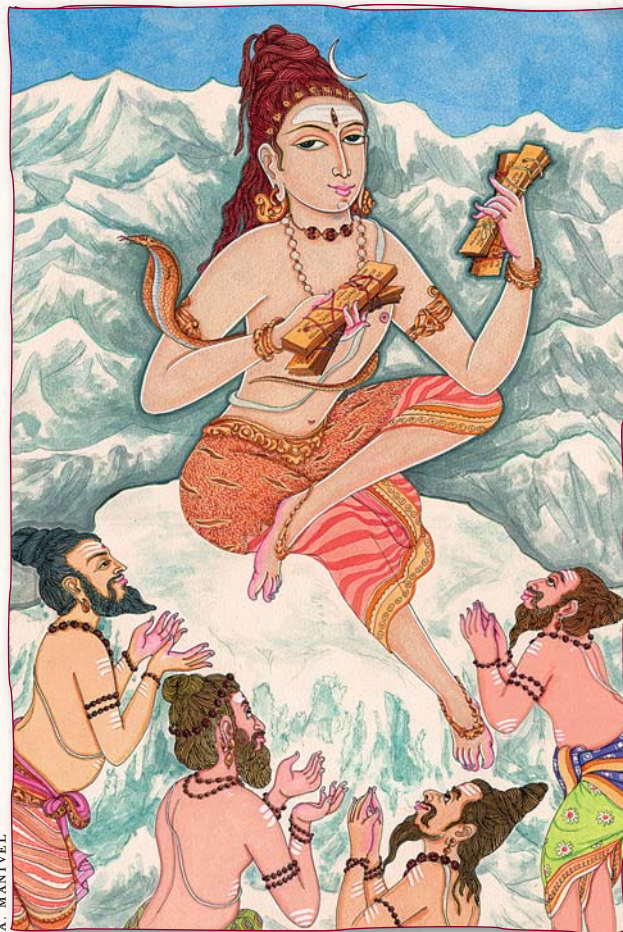
Our “Bible” is called the *Veda*. The *Veda*, which means “wisdom,” is comprised of four ancient and holy scriptures which all Hindus revere as the revealed word of God.

LIKE THE TAOIST *TAO TE CHING*, the Buddhist *Dhammapada*, the Sikh *Adi Granth*, the Jewish *Torah*, the Christian *Bible* and the Muslim *Koran*—the *Veda* is the Hindu holy book. The four books of the *Vedas*—*Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*—include over 100,000 verses. The knowledge imparted by the *Vedas* ranges from earthy devotion to high philosophy. Their words and wisdom permeate Hindu thought, ritual and meditation.

The *Vedas* are the ultimate scriptural authority for Hindus. Their oldest portions are said by some to date back as far as 6,000 BCE, orally transmitted for most of history and written down in Sanskrit in the last few millennia, making them the world's longest and most ancient scripture. The *Vedas* open a rare window into ancient Indian society, proclaiming life's sacredness and the way to oneness with God.

Elaboration: For untold centuries unto today, the *Vedas* have remained the sustaining force and authoritative doctrine, guiding followers in ways of worship, duty and enlightenment. The *Vedas* are the meditative and philosophical focus for millions of monks and a billion seekers. Their stanzas are chanted from memory by priests and laymen daily as liturgy in temple worship and domestic ritual. All Hindus wholeheartedly accept the *Vedas*, yet each draws selectively, interprets freely and amplifies abundantly. Over time, this tolerant allegiance has woven the varied tapestry of Indian Hindu Dharma.

Each of the four *Vedas* has four sections: *Samhitas* (hymn collections), *Brahmanas* (priestly manuals), *Aranyakas* (forest treatises) and *Upanishads* (enlightened discourses). The *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas* affirm that God is immanent and transcendent and



The *Vedas* are revealed scripture, meaning they were issued forth by God through enlightened sages, or rishis. This divine transmission is depicted here as Lord Shiva bestows the four books of the *Veda* to four rishis. The sacred knowledge, passed orally for most of history, was finally scribed in Sanskrit on palm leaves to share and preserve it.

splendor of that Light from whom in the beginning sprang ancient wisdom” (*Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 4.18). “Taking as a bow the great weapon of the *Upanishad*, one should put upon it an arrow sharpened by meditation. Stretching it with a thought directed to the essence of That, penetrate that Imperishable as the mark, my friend” (*Mundaka Upanishad* 2.2.3).

prescribe ritual worship, mantra and devotional hymns to establish communication with the spiritual worlds. The hymns are invocations to the One Divine and to the Divinities of nature, such as the Sun, the Rain, the Wind, the Fire and the Dawn—as well as prayers for matrimony, progeny, prosperity, concord, protection, domestic rites and more.

The *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* outline the soul's evolutionary journey, provide yogic philosophical training and propound realization of man's oneness with God as the destiny of all souls. Today, the *Vedas* are published in Sanskrit, English, French, German and other languages. But it is the popular, metaphysical *Upanishads* that have been most amply and ably translated.

The *Vedas* advise: “Let there be no neglect of Truth. Let there be no neglect of dharma. Let there be no neglect of welfare. Let there be no neglect of prosperity. Let there be no neglect of study and teaching. Let there be no neglect of the duties to the Gods and the ancestors” (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 1.11.1). “United your resolve, united your hearts, may your spirits be one, that you may long together dwell in unity and concord!” (*Rig Veda* 10.191.4). “There, where there is no darkness, nor night, nor day, nor being, nor non-being, there is the Auspicious One, alone, absolute and eternal. There is the glorious

8 Why do many Hindus wear a dot near the middle of their forehead?

The dot worn on the forehead is a religious symbol. It represents divine sight and shows that one is a Hindu. For women, it is also a beauty mark.

THE DOT WORN BETWEEN the eyes or in the middle of the forehead is a sign that one is a Hindu. It is called the bindi in the Hindi language, bindu in Sanskrit and *pottu* in Tamil. In olden days, all Hindu men and women wore these marks, and they both also wore earrings. Today it is the women who are most faithful in wearing the bindi.

The dot has a mystical meaning. It represents the third eye of spiritual sight, which sees things the physical eyes cannot see. Hindus seek to awaken their inner sight through yoga. The forehead dot is a reminder to use and cultivate this spiritual vision to perceive and better understand life's inner workings—to see things not just physically, but with the “mind's eye” as well. The bindi is made of red powder (called *sindur*, traditionally made from powdered turmeric and fresh lime juice), sandal-paste or cosmetics.

In addition to the simple dot, there are many types of forehead marks, known as *tilaka* in Sanskrit. Each mark represents a particular sect or denomination of our vast religion. We have four major sects: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. Vaishnava Hindus, for example, wear a v-shaped *tilaka* made of white clay. Elaborate *tilakas* are worn by Hindus mainly at religious events, though many wear the simple bindi, indicating they are Hindu, even in the general public. By these marks we know what a person believes, and therefore know how to begin conversations.

For Hindu women, the forehead dot is also a beauty mark, not unlike the black mark European and American women once wore on the cheek. The red bindi is generally a sign of marriage. A black bindi is often worn before marriage to ward off the evil eye. As



Decorating the face and body with colorful paints is a universal human practice, often a cultural rite expressing one's tribe, beliefs and identity. The forehead dot shows that one is proud to be a Hindu and bespeaks mystical seeing beyond the five senses. Here, in a simple, daily act, a woman obligingly applies a red bindi to her sister's forehead.

For both boys and girls, men and women, the dot can be small or large depending on the circumstance, but should always be there when appropriate. Naturally, we don't want to flaunt our religion in the face of others. We observe that many Christian men and women take off or conceal their crosses in the corporate business world. Some communities and institutions disallow wearing religious symbols entirely.

an exotic fashion statement, the dot's color complements the color of a lady's sari. Ornate bindis are even worn by actresses in popular American TV shows.

Elaboration: Men and women of a particular religion wishing to identify themselves to one another often do so by wearing distinctive religious symbols. Often these are blessed in their temples, churches or synagogues. Christians wear a cross on a necklace. Jewish boys wear small leather cases that hold scriptural passages, and the round cap called yarmulka. Sikh men wear their hair in a turban. In many countries, Muslim women cover their head with a scarf, called hijab.

Do not be ashamed to wear the bindi on your forehead in the United States, Canada, Europe or any country of the world. Wear it proudly. The forehead dot will distinguish you from all other people as a very special person, a Hindu, a knower of eternal truths. You will never be mistaken as belonging to another nationality or religion. The sacred forehead dot is an easy way of distinguishing Hindus from Muslims. And don't be intimidated when people ask you what the dot means. Now you have lots of information to give a good answer, which will probably lead to more questions about your venerable religion.

9

Are the Gods of Hinduism really married?

It is true that God is often depicted with a spouse in our traditional stories. However, on a deeper philosophical level, the Supreme Being and the Gods are neither male nor female and are therefore not married.

IN POPULAR, VILLAGE HINDUISM God is represented as male, and God's energy, or Shakti, is personified as His spouse—for example, Vishnu and Lakshmi. In Hindu temples, art and mythology, God is everywhere seen as the beloved, divine couple. Philosophically, however, the caution is always made that God and God's energy are One, and the metaphor of the inseparable divine couple serves only to illustrate this Oneness.

Hinduism is taught on many levels to many different people, and to uneducated people who are not able to understand high philosophy, Hinduism is taught in story form. Because the temple is the center of every Hindu community, and everyone is focused on the temple and the Gods within it, the Gods are the major players in these stories. Hindus who understand the higher philosophy seek to find God on the inside while also worshiping God in the temples. Simple folk strive to be like a God, or like a Goddess. These tales, called *Puranas*, have long been the basis of dance, plays and storytelling around the fire in the homes to children as they are growing up. The stories illustrate how a family should live, how they should raise their children, and much more. Before the printing press, there were few books, and Hinduism was conveyed orally through stories and parables. While these often violent children's tales should not be perpetuated, there remains much of value in the extensive writings of the *Puranas*.

Elaboration: Those who learn the higher Hindu philosophies know that Gods are neither male nor female. In fact, attaining to that Godly level of being is one of the mystical goals of yoga. This is accomplished by blending the feminine and masculine currents,



Through history Hindus have depicted God as Ardhanarishvara, which literally means "half-female Lord"—Siva as male on the right and female on the left. This vision of the Divine as our Mother-Father God supersedes the popular, mythological notion of marriage of a God and Goddess, declaring that God and His energy are one.

ida and pingala, into the spiritual current, *sushumna*, in the center of the spine within each individual.

Hindus know that the Gods do not marry, that they are complete within themselves. This unity is depicted in the traditional icon of Ardhanarishvara, Siva as half man and half woman, and in the teaching that Siva and Shakti are one, that Shakti is Siva's energy. Siva is dearly loved as our Father-Mother God. Yet, sexual gender and matrimonial relations are of the physical and emotional realms, whereas the Gods exist in a stratum that far supersedes these levels of life. For that matter, the soul itself is neither male nor female.

Some modern swamis now urge devotees not to pay any attention to Puranic stories about the Gods, saying that they have no relationship with the world today—that they are misleading and confusing and should no longer be taught to the children. Instead, they encourage followers to deepen themselves with the higher philosophies of the Vedic *Upanishads* and the realizations of Hindu seers.

Other faiths sometimes criticize the Hindu religion as a sort of comic-book religion, and we should not be part of perpetuating that image by passing on such misconceptions as the marriage of the Gods. Other religions move and adjust with the times. Hinduism must also do so. It must offer

answers to the questions about God, soul and world—answers that are reasonable, that can be understood and accepted even by a child, that are coherent, sensible and strictly in accord with scripture and tradition. This is necessary in the technological age, necessary in order that Hinduism will be a religion of the future, not of the past.

10

What about caste and untouchability?

Caste is the hereditary division of Indian society based on occupation. The lowest class, deemed untouchables, suffer from discrimination and mistreatment. It is illegal in India to discriminate against, abuse or insult anyone on the basis of caste.

CASTE, FROM THE PORTUGUESE *casta*, meaning "clan" or "lineage," refers to two systems within Hindu society. The first is *varna*, the division of society into four groups: workers, business people, lawmakers/law enforcers and priests. The second is *jati*, the thousands of occupational guilds whose members follow a single profession. *Jati* members usually marry within their own *jati* and follow traditions associated with their *jati*. In urban areas they often enter other occupations, but still usually arrange marriages within the *jati*.

Wealth, especially in urban areas, often trumps caste. Industrialization and education have greatly altered India's *jati* system by eliminating or changing the professions upon which it was originally based, and opening new employment options. The *jatis* are evolving to function today less like guilds and more like large clans of related families. At the bottom are the so-called untouchables, who perform the dirtiest jobs and have suffered much like the black people of America, who were freed from slavery just 138 years ago. Strong laws have been passed in India to end caste-based discrimination. Modern Hindus rightly deplore caste abuse and are working to set matters right. Just as in the US, it is a difficult task that will take decades, especially in the villages.

Elaboration: Caste is, no doubt, the biggest stick that Hindus get beaten with. It is taught as the defining attribute, or fatal flaw, of Hinduism in Western schools. Untouchability as a formal system shocks Westerners. One response we can make is to separate social stratification from the issue of racial/class discrimination.

First issue: social stratification. India is one of the world's oldest



Representatives of the four castes, or *varnas*, are shown here surrounding Lord Ganesha. They are: worker, businessman, general and priest. These are natural divisions which appear in all nations and societies as shown by the universal existence, in some form, of labor unions, businessmen's associations, armies and police forces, and religious ministers.

societies. It has sustained a continuity of culture and religion for thousands of years. Europe, on the other hand, has seen millennia of upheaval. Still, one only has to go back to before the 17th-century industrial revolution to find a social system that is similar to caste. European society then comprised the landed elite (including royalty, a hereditary caste maintained to this day), merchants, artisans and peasants. The artisans formed guilds, occupation-based organizations that served both as closed unions and marketing monopolies. The guild legacy remains in Western surnames such as Smith, a metal worker. There was no public education system, and each generation learned at home the family occupation. There was little technological change, so jobs were static. Industrialization and public education altered (but did not destroy) this class system in the West, just as they are changing caste and *jati* in India today.

Second issue: racial/class discrimination. Most Indians are unfamiliar with the extent of discrimination in the West today. In America, for example, hundreds of thousands live destitute and homeless on city streets, as true "untouchables." US cities are more racially segregated than before the 1950s Civil Rights Movement because of "white flight" to the suburbs. Black Americans receive

harsher sentences than white Americans for the same crime. Many Native American Indians live at the bottom of society, destitute and alcoholic, on barren Indian reservations. This kind of response—we can call it the "You're one, too" defense—doesn't mean Hindus should not work much harder to end caste discrimination. But it reminds others that no country in the world is yet free from racial discrimination.

11

Is yoga a Hindu practice?

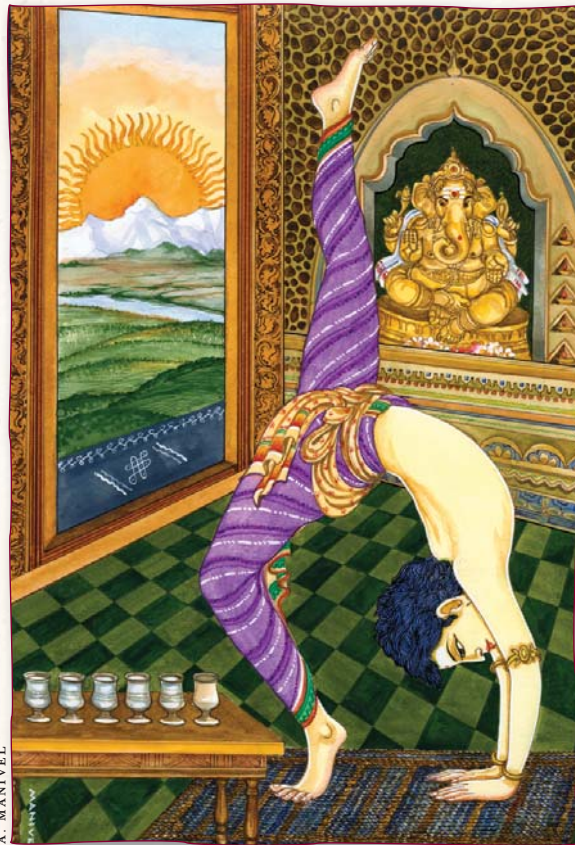
Deeply rooted in Hindu scripture and belief, yoga is, and always was, a vital part of Hindu religion and culture. Today it is embraced by tens of millions of non-Hindus seeking its renowned benefits to physical, mental and spiritual health.

IN RECENT YEARS A VIGOROUS DEBATE has arisen as to whether yoga is intrinsically a Hindu practice or a universal science. The word *yoga* has changed as the practice moved west. Its original meaning, "union with God," has been replaced with the more secular definition presented by upscale yoga studios around the world that teach a regimen of asanas along with basic breathing and a little meditation. A typical studio ad focuses on the physicality, stating that "yoga increases the circulation of oxygen-rich blood, nourishing and detoxifying the internal organs, musculature, cardiovascular, immune, endocrine, digestive, reproductive and nervous systems." The United States alone has over 20 million practitioners, and there are hundreds of millions worldwide.

B.K.S. Iyengar, a renowned yoga teacher, gives a more traditional definition on his website: "Yoga is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. The word *yoga* originates from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means 'union.' On the spiritual plane, it means union of the Individual Self with the Universal Self."

Elaboration: The term *yoga* actually refers to a wide range of Hindu practices; so it is important to specify what kind of yoga is being discussed. In common modern usage, *yoga* typically refers to hatha yoga—the performance of yoga postures, or asanas, which are drawn from ancient Hindu scriptures. Hatha yoga has always been performed by Hindus as a preparation for meditation; today, especially in the West, its health benefits commonly supersede the spiritual. Hatha yoga is just one facet of a broader body of knowledge and practice known as *ashtanga* yoga, which consists of eight stages. (*Ashta* means eight; *anga* means limb). The famous *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, who lived around 200 bce, is considered the first systematic presentation of the ancient tradition of yoga.

To appreciate yoga's spiritual and religious nature, one need only



At dawn a devotee practices an advanced hatha yoga asana as part of a series that will prepare him for meditation. Each day in his shrine room, he follows a one-hour spiritual routine of yoga, worship and meditation.

consider each of its eight limbs, or facets. The first is *yama*, the ethical restraints; of these, the most important is ahimsa, noninjuriousness. The second is *niyama*, specific religious observances, including puja in one's home shrine and repeating mantras. The third is *asana*, the widely practiced hatha yoga postures. The remaining five limbs are all related to meditation: *pranayama* (breath control), *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (illumination, or oneness with God).

Can those of other faiths benefit from the practice of yoga—without threatening their religion's beliefs? Certainly followers of liberal religious traditions can do so. However, clerics of conservative faith traditions have spoken against its practice for their adherents. For example, in 2008 the leading Islamic council in Malaysia issued an edict prohibiting the country's Muslims from practicing yoga. Council chairman Abdul Shukor Husim explained: "We are of the view that yoga, which originates in Hinduism... destroys a Muslim's faith. There are other ways to get exercise. You can go cycling, swimming, etc."

The Reverend Richard Farr, vicar of Saint Mary's Church in Henham, England, commented in 2001: "I accept that for some people it is simply an exercise. But it is also often a gateway into other spiritualities, including Eastern mysticism." The Vatican has issued numerous edicts about the pursuit of yoga. In 1989 it warned that practices like Zen and yoga can "degenerate into a cult of the body" that debases Christian prayer.

It is sometimes argued that yoga is not Hindu *per se*; only the roots are Hindu. The fact that yoga is pursued by many non-Hindus is irrelevant to its validity as a Hindu practice. The roots of yoga, its scriptural origins, are Hindu. The stem of yoga, its practice, is Hindu; and the flower of yoga, mystical union with God, is Hindu. Yoga, in its full glory, is entirely Hindu. Practice at your own risk!

12

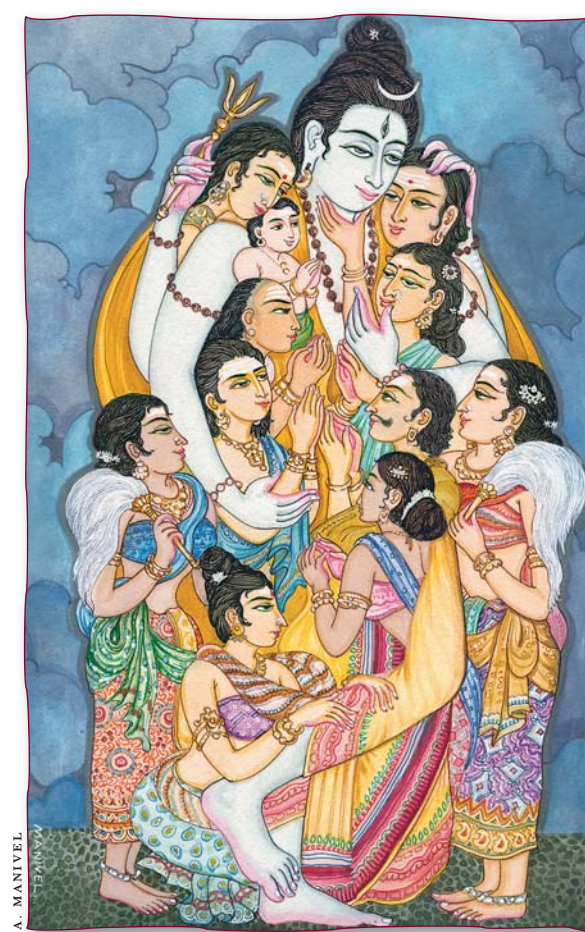
How do Hindus view other religions?

Hindus honor all religious traditions and the people within them. While regarding our faith as uniquely endowed, we believe that there is no exclusive path, no one way for all.

IN INDIA, WHERE HINDUS ARE THE overwhelming majority, the rights of minority religions have always been honored. Hindus have welcomed, embraced and lived peacefully among other religions for centuries. During those same centuries, Hinduism itself evolved into hundreds of strains, and thus Hindus are fully at home with many different traditions and viewpoints within their own faith. Hence, they are naturally tolerant of other religions, respecting the fact that each has unique beliefs, practices, goals and paths of attainment, and not objecting when the doctrines of one conflict with those of another. Hindus readily accept the idea that it is not necessary, desirable or even possible for everyone to hold the same beliefs. And certainly such differences should never be cause for tension, criticism, intolerance or violence.

An ancient Sanskrit verse summarizes the Hindu attitude: "As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

Hindus do not proselytize, meaning they do not try to convert members of other faiths to their own. Proselytizing is based upon the belief that one's religion is the only true religion and everyone else should join it. Hindus hold the view that all faiths are beneficial. A devout Hindu is supportive of all efforts that lead to a pure and virtuous life and would consider it unthinkable to dissuade a sincere devotee from his chosen faith. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations. While encouraging others to follow their chosen path with dedication, Hindus hold Sanatana Dharma to be the fullest expression of religion, and do accept sincere souls who seek entrance into Hinduism.



Here the artist depicts the intimate affection between God Siva and humanity. All are embraced, accepted and loved, whatever path they follow, whatever religion they profess.

Elaboration: When discussing other religions, Hindu leaders often quote a verse from the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46): "Ekam Sat, viprah bahudha vadanti," meaning "Truth is One, sages describe it variously." It conveys a core Hindu idea: that there can be multiple valid viewpoints about the Supreme. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, philosopher and former president of India, stressed this point: "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it."

In expressing religious tolerance, Hindus sometimes cite the above verse to assert that all religions are the same. In reality, all religions are not the same, nor is that indicated by this verse. It simply says that all religions revere the One Truth; all believe in the One Supreme Being. Their beliefs and practices are different; their paths are distinct. Instead of saying, "All religions are the same," it is better to state that "all religions are good."

Hindus share values common to all faiths: piety, love of God, respect for tradition, a stress on duty, responsibility and basic human virtues, such as nonviolence, truthfulness, compassion and charity. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations. They also acknowledge and honor the many ways that religions differ. For example, meditation and yoga are commonly practiced in

Eastern religions but not usually in Western faiths.

The heart of a religion is its understanding of the soul's relationship to God. Hinduism and most Eastern religions believe that, at the highest level, God and soul are one, inseparable, while Western faiths maintain that Creator and creation are eternally distinct.

Hindus support and participate in ecumenical gatherings with other religions, while upholding their own traditions. They confidently defend their faith, proceed contentedly with their practices and avoid the enchantment of other ways, be they ancient or modern.

13

Why do some Hindu Gods have animal bodies?

It is true that God is often depicted with a spouse in our traditional stories. However, on a deeper philosophical level, the Supreme Being and the Gods are neither male nor female and are therefore not married.

THE VARIOUS GODS IN HINDUISM'S wide-ranging traditions possess distinct personalities and forms based on how they have been seen in visions and how they are depicted in stories and legends. Hindus feel no need to question the fact, for instance, that Lord Ganesha has the head of an elephant. They know He has been seen in this way by rishis and even by ordinary devotees. Did He choose that form to distinguish Himself as the Lord of Obstacles? No one really knows. The important fact is that millions of Hindus worship and receive blessings from the benevolent Elephant-Faced God every day. Many Hindus seeking an explanation hold that Ganesha is a real being who looks like an elephant. Others believe the elephant form is symbolic. Millions are content with the ancient stories in the *Puranas* that explain how He came to have an elephant head. Interestingly, and perhaps because of His endearing visage, Ganesha is the most popular of all the Hindu Deities. Numerous other Hindu Divinities have animal attributes, including Hanuman, Varuna, Kamadhenu, the Nagas, the *vahanas* (animal mounts of the Gods) and four of Vishnu's ten incarnations (fish, turtle, boar and half-man-half-lion).

Elaboration: An exploration of other ancient faiths shows that Hinduism is not alone in having Divinities with animal attributes. The ancient Greeks worshiped the God Pan, who has the hindquarters, legs and horns of a goat, and the Sea Gods Ichthyocentaurs, with human heads and torsos, the front legs of a horse and the serpentine tails of fish. In Egypt's pantheon, Anubis (God of the Underworld) is a falcon-headed man, as is Ra (the Sun God). Thoth (Lord of Wisdom and of the Moon) has the head of an ibis or a baboon, and His consort, Bastet, has the form of a cat or a lioness. The Mesoamerican peoples worshiped Quetzalcoatl, a feathered serpent. The Assyrians feared the powerful serpent Goddess Tiamat and revered various winged beings. In Japan—where Buddhism and Shintoism are intertwined—Kitsune the fox and Tengu the bird man are powerful shape-shifters who can transform into human or inanimate shapes to trick humans. Many shrines there are guarded by a pair of magical lion-dogs known as the Koma-inu or Shishi.

In a discussion with Christians, who tend to ridicule Hinduism on this point, you can recall that winged angels are half-human and half-bird. Four-headed beings called the Cherubim were central in the early Christianity. In the Bible's *Book of Revelation*, John writes: "I saw a throne standing in heaven; and



Hanuman carries Iraivan Temple from India to Hawaii. With His monkey body, Hanuman is one of many non-human Deities in the Hindu pantheon. A devotee of Lord Rama, He is regarded as a powerful ally to all on the spiritual path, a symbol of strength and dedication.

the One who was sitting on the throne... In the center, grouped around the throne itself, were four animals with many eyes, in front and behind. The first animal was like a lion, the second like a bull, the third animal had a human face, and the fourth animal was like a flying eagle. Each of the four animals had six wings..." (4:1-8). The description matches an account by Jewish prophet Elijah centuries before. Importantly, these beings are the most powerful beings in the pantheon, closest to the Creator.

Over the millennia, worship and awareness of Deities with animal features was eclipsed in most cultures as the monotheistic religions grew into prominence. Were these beings mere myth and imagination, as depicted by modern scholars? Or were the peoples of ancient times aware of a mystical reality that has been sealed off? In most cultures, the old Gods have been put in exile. Only in Hinduism does such worship thrive in unbroken continuity.

One might note the obvious fact that *Homo sapiens*, too, is an animal specie, one among many.

14

Why do Hindus cremate the dead?

Hindus arrange swift cremation of the dead, ideally within 24 hours. The fire and accompanying rites sever ties to earthly life and give momentum to the soul for its continuing spiritual journey.

HINDUS TRADITIONALLY CREMATE their dead because a fiery dissolution of the body brings swifter, more complete release of the soul than burial, which preserves the soul's psychic connection to its just-ended earthly life. After death, the departed soul hovers close to the earth plane in its astral body, emotionally attached to the physical body and its old surroundings, still able to see this material world. The funeral rites and burning of the body signify spiritual release, notifying the soul that, in fact, death has come. Some of the funeral chants address the deceased, urging the soul to relinquish attachments and continue its spiritual journey. The Gods and devas are invoked to assist the soul in its transition. The fire severs ties to earthly life and gives momentum to the soul, granting at least momentary access to refined, heavenly realms. All attention is on a singular goal, as expressed in this prayer from the *Rig Veda*: "Release him again, O Agni, to the fathers. The one offered to you now proceeds to his destiny. Putting on new life, let him approach the surviving, let him reunite with a [new] body, All-Knowing One!" (10. 16. 5).

Elaboration: Hindus do not believe in bodily resurrection and the reuniting of each soul with its physical body, so they place no importance on preserving the corpse, which is the intent of burial in Christianity and Islam. The Hindu belief in reincarnation gives assurance that death is merely the soul's release from the current life. An ancient text puts it simply, "Even as the snake sloughs off its skin, even as the bird leaves its shell, even as in its waking state the soul forgets happenings of the dream state, thus does the soul migrate from one body to another..." (*Tirumantiram* 2132).

Family and friends take an active part in releasing the departed soul: preparing the body, joining in the rituals, transporting the body to the cremation grounds and lighting the pyre. After cremation, the ashes are ceremoniously committed to a river (often the Ganga), lake or ocean, along with garlands and flowers. While the rites allow family a dignified farewell and an opportunity to express grief, all present know there will be other bodies, other lives. Mourning is never suppressed, but scriptures admonish against excessive lamentation and encourage joyous release. The departed soul feels the impact of emotional forces directed at him, and prolonged grieving can hold him in earthly consciousness, inhibiting full transition to the inner worlds. Hindus speak of death as the Great Departure, regarding it as life's most exalted moment. The



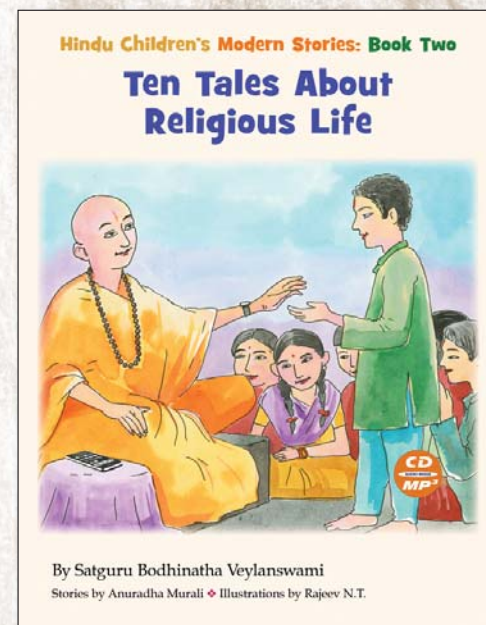
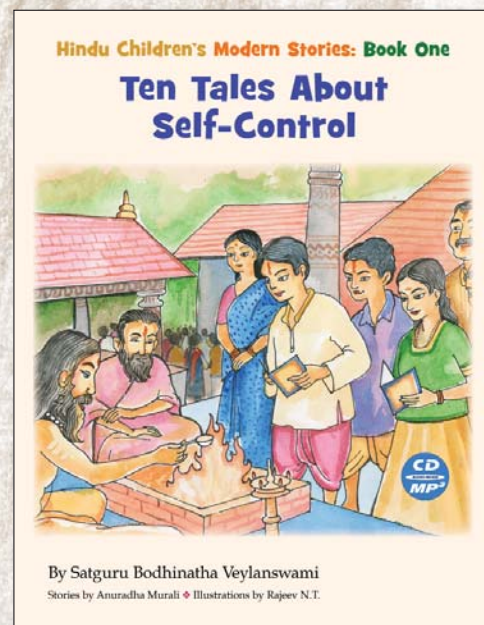
A body, wrapped in cotton cloth, is placed on a funeral pyre made of stacks of wood. Flames return the elements to nature, leaving purified ashes that will be placed in a river or other body of water.

death anniversary is called Liberation Day.

Cremation is prescribed in the Vedic texts, and Hindu funeral customs are remarkably uniform throughout India. Cremation is also practiced by other Indic faiths, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism, and is becoming popular worldwide. Many believe the body should be disposed of as swiftly and cleanly as possible and that fire is the purest way to return the physical elements to their source. It is less expensive than burial, with a smaller impact on the environment. Recent figures show cremations are chosen by 35% in the US, 72% in the UK, 99% in Japan, 68% in Canada and 49% in China.

Infants and small children, however, are buried in Hindu tradition. Another exception pertains to enlightened souls, for whom the body is often interred in a crypt filled with salt, and a shrine or temple is constructed at the site. Sacred texts assert their remarkable disciplines have endowed the physical body with immense spiritual power, which can radiate for generations, giving blessings through this sacred *samadhi*, especially if that soul remains aware of the Earth plane.

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FROM THE AGAMAS

How to Establish a Village

Steps for laying out a town and rituals of first entry to the new homes

The following text is from the Kriya Pada of Kamika Agama, chapter 33, entitled "Directions for the solemn entry into the allocated parts of the village and the houses." Chapter 30 (July, 2011) detailed the layout of a village. This chapter explains how a village should be created and first settled.

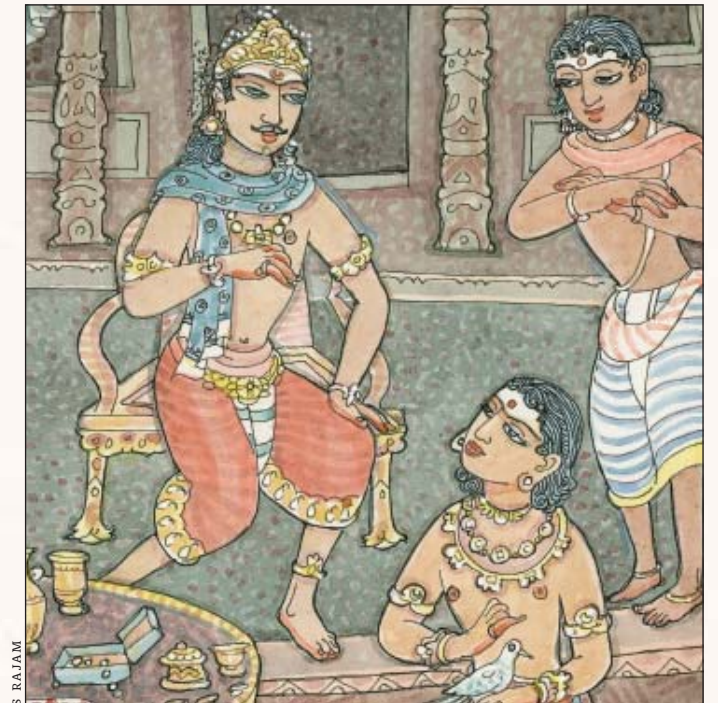
NOW I WILL TELL YOU THE SEQUENTIAL ACTIVITIES RELATED TO the establishment of the village and to the first entry into the new houses and other buildings: 1) systematic analysis of the appropriate time to begin; 2) ascertaining of exact site; 3) examination of the site; 4) offering of *bali* (such as cooked rice) prior to taking possession the selected land; 5) taking possession of the site; 6) executing the preliminary activities such as ploughing the selected land, sowing the seeds and so forth (to determine the fertility of the soil); 7) erection of a post to ascertain the true east and true north (by observing the shadow of the sun); 8) selection of a suitable *vastu mandala* (architectural pattern) to be applied to the proposed village and houses; 9) establishment of a rectangular pattern of east-west lines and north-south lines; 10) offering *bali* to the *vastu* Deities (governing architecture); 11) planning of various roads and streets and of various types of houses to be constructed along the proper roads and streets; 12) laying of foundations in appropriate places and construction of buildings.

Now I will explain the process for the first solemn entry of the king (or his representative) into the village and other settlements, houses and such others, the large edifices known as *malika*, pavilions, halls, kitchen and other such buildings.

On the occasion of his first entry, the king should donate land and valuable gifts to the highly qualified brahmins. These are brahmins who are always good-minded, who control their senses, who are compassionate, who hold firmly to their vows, who live with spouses, sons and daughters, who know how to behave properly in all situations, and whose birth stars are compatible to the birth star for the village (as determined by *vastu*). They worship the Deity, fire and guru without fail and know well the *tattvas* (basic principles of creation) enshrined in the *Vedas* and the *Vedangas*. They have been well trained in the recital of the *Vedas* and are pleasing and gracious to look at. They have elaborately studied the Saiva scriptures and are bereft of distressing factors, such as poverty, indigence and so forth. They take delight in performing exalted and supreme deeds and are highly motivated in the practice of religious austerities.

Having invited such highly qualified brahmins and appointed them to be the honored recipients of the donations, he should make a record of certain features related to their identity. These ten particulars are to be inscribed in copper or on stone: 1) the name of their region of origin, 2) the name of their birthplace, 3) their *gotra* (family lineage), 4) their *sutra* (Vedic lineage), 5) any marks of identity visible on the right side, 6) any marks visible on the left side, 7) their educational qualifications, 8) their sub-division of the caste, 9) the name of their father and mother, and 10) honors received.

Having prepared such a record, he should donate valuable things in a careful and systematic manner, each time pouring water from his right hand. First, he should make the gift of land, then he should



Gift-giving: The king begins the ceremonial opening of a new village by presentation of gifts to highly qualified brahmins

donate household tools and utensils. For the ladies related to those brahmins, he should donate ornaments, food-grains, clothes, milk-yielding cows, and suitable female servants and male servants.

The brahmins who do not have faith in God, scriptures and self-disciplines, who are harsh and unkind, malicious, who abuse the Deity, fire ritual and guru, who have violently plundered the assets dedicated to God, as well as the brahmins who are in the company of traitors and rebellious men, are to be abandoned by the king in such activity of making grants and donations.

The solemn and first entry should not be performed in the houses that are not yet provided with doors, which are not covered with enough roofing, in which the offering of *bali* for the *vastu* Deities had not been duly performed and in which some of its parts had already been used. Without any hesitation, such houses are to be avoided for the first entry, since they will yield misfortunes to the occupants. The owners should arrange for the entry of the qualified brahmins into their newly built houses according to their capacity. The owner should make his first entry in an auspicious day, synchronizing with a lunar mansion or a zodiacal house favorable to him.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Silpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Kamika Agama*.



Goa

SPECIAL FEATURE

Surviving a Troubled Past, Thriving in a Progressive Present

CONSIDER EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT THE lushly tropical state of Goa. In following our journalist's footsteps there, those stereotypes may have to be discarded. HINDUISM TODAY went to the jewel of the Konkan to ferret out the real Goans, to learn how they live and connect with the Gods, and

how strong Hinduism has remained despite centuries of persecution—which began long before the arrival of the Christian missionaries with their Bible-and-sword hegemony. Has an authentic form of the Sanatana Dharma survived? Allow the Goans to speak for themselves.

BY RAJIV MALIK, PANAJI, GOA

IT IS A LAND OF NATURAL MARVELS, basking blissfully in the warm sun of West India, where coconut trees sway dreamily in the wind and the very earth mirrors the smiles of its people. It is also a land of devotion, where God's temples are meticulously cared for by local families, festivals are vigorously celebrated and the population's Hindu faith is so ardent that centuries of proselytizing and oppression could not subdue it. Meet Goa, the marvel of West India.

This small, strikingly beautiful region has been ruled by kings and officials of many faiths. In the 3rd century CE, Goa was incorporated into the Mauryan Empire, ruled by the Buddhist emperor Ashoka. Buddhist monks worked tirelessly to spread their religion here. Several rulers followed, many vigorously proselytizing their own religious preferences—the Chutus of Karwar, the Western Kshatrapas, the Abhiras, the Bhojas, the Konkan Mauryas and others. From 765 to 1015, the Jain Silharas of the Rashtrakuta dynasty ruled Goa, sponsoring their faith and building Jain temples. In 1312, Goa came under the Delhi Sultanate, which propagated Islam, only to be taken a few decades later by the might of the Hindu Vijayanagara empire.

In 1498, Muslims conquered Goa again. Soon thereafter, in 1510, the ruling Bijapur kings were defeated by the Portuguese, who established a permanent settlement and aggressively proselytized the Christian faith.

In spite of the chaos imposed by successive rulers of different religions—or perhaps seasoned and strengthened by it—Goans have mostly kept to their roots. Two thirds of the population is Hindu; another 26% is Christian and 6% is Muslim.

Hardship Under the Portuguese

Today Goa is a peaceful state in which religious harmony prevails. But the fanaticism of the Portuguese's first two centuries of rule left visible scars. A nondescript wooden pole alongside a major road, in a populous area, is an awful token of those times. There are no signs to identify it; a tourist might take it for a telephone pole. But this was the *hath kata khamba* (pole where hands are cut), used to punish those who committed crimes during the Portuguese era. A local historian, Dr. Pramod Pathak, explains that the pole was used to punish neo-converts who were not following their new Christian religion seriously and still lived like Hindus at home.

The first missionaries realized early on that despite the persuasive power of brute force—"conversions were made," wrote contemporary Portuguese chroniclers, with "the cross in one hand, the sword in the other"—it was difficult to wrench Goans from their Hindu beliefs and traditions.

Given the often dishonest or brutal methods used, it is no surprise that new converts did not become enthusiastic Christians. Historians say the early Portuguese played on the strict mentality of the Goans, using their

prejudices against them. The Portuguese would plant evidence in people's front yards that they had converted to Christianity, using a cross, or more subtly, spreading crumbs of bread—which no *chapati*-loving Hindu would eat. Tainted by these signs of alien behavior, those who lived there would be shunned by haughty Hindu neighbors. The sense of caste and purity is keenly upheld in Goa—to a fault. Isolated, the shunned Hindus eventually converted, out of the need to belong to some community.

In 1567, the captain of Rachal Fort in South Goa bragged to his Portuguese king back home, "For nights and nights we went on demolishing, demolishing, demolishing 280 Hindu temples. Not one remained in the happy lands of our division." Jesuit historian Francisco de Souza jubilantly praised the feat, "It is incredible, the sentiment that the gentile were seized of when they saw their temple burning."

In fact, every demolished temple was soon relocated and rebuilt; the murtis, and in some cases the *homa kunda*, were heroically rescued and reinstalled. Chandrakant Keni, a leading Goan poet, says that although Goa's Hindus were put to severe tests as conquerors marched over their lands, they had the resilience to convert "temporary setbacks into permanent victories."

Catholicism as it is practiced in Goa has incorporated elements of Hinduism. Early European travelers, like Venetian Pietro Della Valle, who visited Goa in the 1700s, denounced in their travelogues "unchristian" practices in local Catholic churches and shrines. That was, it seemed,



The people of Goa proudly assert that this is the land the Gods chose to live in



(Clockwise from top right)
Stunning natural beauty is commonplace in Goa, and fish a staple food among Hindus; simple houses and hotels dot the coast; two girls in traditional clothes enjoy a beach on the 63-mile coast facing the Arabian Sea



the only way conversions could be made, by largely allowing Hindus to retain aspects of their faith. To this day, *kumbhas* are used for Catholic processions and a Sivalinga stands in front of the Virgin Mary in one of Goa's churches. At one stage, the Vatican tersely censured those "gentile practices" and the proliferation of icons in churches, but eventually it relented. In 1623 Pope Gregory gave sanction for converted brahmins to continue wearing their sacred thread and caste marks. Goan Catholics uphold the Hindu caste system even today.

The Portuguese enforced a colonial stranglehold that would last until December 12, 1961, when the Indian army—despite protests from Portugal and most of the international community—completed a successful three-day operation to rescue what would become India's smallest state. Goa has just 1,429 square miles, slightly less than America's smallest state, Rhode Island.

Today there are as few as 700 Catholic priests in Goa. Many churches are closed except for festivals, and old chapels have fallen into disuse. In contrast, Hindu temples are flourishing. The ubiquitous tulsi plant grows throughout the state, a local symbol marking a Hindu home, happily planted on front gardens everywhere and honored with daily *arati* by Hindu wives.

Concord has descended on the Goan population. Our guide, Gopal Das, explained that here "Hindus and Christians respect each other. They join each other's religious festivals as a courtesy. Catholics come to yatras and Hindus drop by processions. Today it is about respecting our neighbors, friends and co-workers, not about dogma."

Exotic Goa, So Familiar

I traveled to Goa with my wife Renu. We were both pleased to visit a place whose name, to us, is synonymous with natural beauty. Language was no barrier; though most Goans speak Konkani, English is widely used, and the locals are quick to smile and offer help. Gopal Das, a local member of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha (see July/August/September 2011 edition of HINDUISM TODAY), generously offered to be our guide. Joining our crew was Vivek Ivan Thayil, a Goa-born photographer.

Goa, with a population of 1.4 million, is one of India's richest states; its per-capita GDP is two and a half times India's average. Tourism is the primary industry; twelve percent of India's foreign tourists arrive here. In the wintertime they come from abroad, mainly Europe, to enjoy the climate; in the summertime, Goa's rainy season, they come from all over India to spend the holidays. State-sponsored publicity campaigns project an image of exotic beaches, colorful nightlife and Las Vegas-style casinos on docked cruise ships.

Coming from North India, I unconsciously brought along a prejudiced idea of this state that is common in our country. The rowdy behavior of many tourists—joined by a small fraction of locals—and the impact of their dollars have linked Goa with drugs, harlotry, liquor and a land mafia. Headlines are made of such fodder; and popular Hindi movies portray Goans as mostly Christian, Westernized in their ways and indulgent in their morals. But this is not the reality of Goa, as experienced by the two-thirds Hindu majority. Neither the print media nor Bollywood movies have ever highlighted the spiritual

dimensions of Goa, its ancient Hindu *maths* (monasteries) and temples.

We first visited Goa's state capital, Panaji, a city of only 65,000. Less famous than the larger cities of Vasco da Gama and Margão, this northern city has a charm of its own. The name means "land that never floods," a definite asset where monsoon rains are heavy and steady every summer. Panaji's terraced hills are dotted with colonial-era, Portuguese-style houses sporting red-tiled roofs and whimsical balconies. Bleach-white churches, fancy villas, cobbled streets and interesting buildings give Panaji a European feel. Yet this is unquestionably India: the people, the colors and the manners are evidence that foreign influences have never etched below the surface.

In the *Skanda Purana*, Goa is referred to as the Land of the Gods. A popular story has it that Lord Parashurama, a brahmin hero and an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, bestowed upon a few brahmin families an entire land formerly owned by kshatriyas who had dared to defy him. After defeating his enemies, Parashurama invited brahmins to settle in the vicinity of Gomanchala mountain in the Konkan region, and there perform their religious duties. A dynasty of ten sages brought murtis of their Deities; after weeks of travel, they reached the mountain and established themselves anew. Tradition has preserved the names of some of those pioneers: Adhyapan, Adhyayan, Yajana, Dana and Pratigraha. Lord Parashurama then created eight villages for his new people. When he left Goa, these brahmins became the sole lords of the land, to care for it into eternity. This oft-repeated story empowers modern-

day Goans, strengthening their sense of duty and their connection with the land and its traditions.

The descendants of these original families are called the Gaud Saraswath Brahmins (GSB). Membership is a mark of distinction, carrying social and religious privileges. Hindu temples in Goa are, almost all of them, private and run by traditional GSB families who allow guests to worship under rules. Access to the innermost areas of the temple is usually restricted to GSB family members. Though they are a small group, comprising only six percent of the population, the Gaud Saraswath Brahmins, considered the original inhabitants of the land, are the *de facto* leaders of any local religious activity.

In Goa's system, every temple is associated with one of the *maths*. Goa's two main *maths* are the Kavale Math (Smarta) and the Partagal Math (Vaishnavite). While the temple administrators are responsible for quotidian matters, spiritual decisions come from the guru of the *math* that oversees that temple.

Bhaskar Khandeparkar, an architect, shared some history with us: "In olden times, all Saraswaths were members of Kavale Math. In 1540, the Portuguese demolished all our temples located in the old conquest area; even the British did not damage our religion

elsewhere in India the way the Portuguese did here in Goa. Our Swamiji [of the Smarta tradition] left for Mumbai and Varanasi. Finally, in 1630, his distant successor returned to Goa; but in the interim, many of our people had come under the influence of dvaita philosophy and started the Partagal Math. These two *maths* represent different philosophies, but they work in absolute harmony with each other."

Sri Mangeshi Temple

We drove some thirty kilometers from Panaji to the Ponda region, Goa's Hindu heartland. There, on a hillock near Priol surrounded by green hills, lies a temple dedicated to Lord Mangeshi, a form of Lord Siva. The Deity was brought from the nearby village of Cortalim on May 1, 1560, just before the destruction of its original temple by the Portuguese colonizers, who were ruthless iconoclasts and ardent proselytizers in the early days of their rule.

The new temple began as a simple structure; the current temple complex was only built in 1739, under Maratha rule. In 1764 this area, too, fell under Portuguese control; but by that time, the colonizers had lost their initial zeal, and the Hindu Gods could once again be worshiped in safety. Lord Mangeshi's new home remained untouched and survives intact to the present day.

The Sri Mangeshi Temple is built in typical Goan style, blending Indian and Portuguese influences in unexpected harmony. Its magnificent water tank is believed to be the oldest part of the complex. I was fascinated with the majestic seven-storeyed *deepstambha* at the entrance, a distinctive architectural feature of most local temples similar to a coastal lighthouse. It seems to serve a

purpose similar to a South Indian gopuram (temple entrance tower), its several stories evoking higher realms of existence and the denizens of those planes, devas and Gods who, like us, come to commune at the temple. It is also a landmark, visible from afar, guiding travelers to the temple.

The *sabhagriha*, main hall, is a spacious room which accommodates over 500 people. Its crystal chandeliers from the nineteenth century contrast strangely with the Chola-style granite pillars, which are considered the most beautiful in the state. From the *sabhagriha* one reaches the sacred *garbhagriha*, wherein resides the murti of Lord Mangeshi.

This temple, though large in relation to others in Goa, does not match the architectural magnitude of massive temples elsewhere in India. But somehow the Sri Mangeshi Temple harmoniously finds room for shrines of Parvati, Ganesha, Nandikeshvar, Gajana, Bhagavati, Mulakeshwar, Virabhadra, Santeri, Lakshminarayana, Suryanarayan, Garud, Kala Bhairav and—a common feature in Goa—the chosen Deity of a few influential families connected to the temple, in this case *gramapurusha* Deva Sharma of the Kaudanya *gotra*.

Gopal Das, our guide, explained that Goan Hindus emphasize the importance of their *gramadevata* (family or local Deity). Every village has a *gramadevata*, to whom the villagers are passionately devoted. Therefore, each temple is the hub of a particular group of families who worship the same Deity. Each of these local Gods represents one of the greater Gods. "Basically, all Gods here are Siva, Lakshmi, Durga and Kali, in many forms familiar to the locals and under different names." Thus, being away from one's local temple is no impediment to worship.

Though it was a hot summer day and Goa's lovely beaches beckoned, long queues of devout Hindus awaited the afternoon *arati*. The women's graceful saris outshone the dull Western attire of the men. Most Goan temples have strict dress codes, due to the overwhelming number of tourists. This temple enforces reasonable standards: Western clothing is tolerated, but not informal or revealing pieces. Photography inside the temple is, of course, prohibited.

It was high noon by the time we received darshan of Sri Mangeshi, the main Deity.

The real Goa is far more intriguing—and enjoyable—than its stereotype



(opposite page) Calangute beach gathers fun-loving, noise-tolerant, racuous tourists who don't mind the crowd—and might even like it; (far left) Dom Afonso D'Albuquerque, second Portuguese governor of Goa, known as "The Terrible" and "The Portuguese Mars"; (left) the hath kata kambha, or hand-cutting pole



ALL PHOTOS: VIVEK IVAN

The influence of Portuguese architecture is evident, but the results are harmonious



(top) The Sri Mangeshi Temple stands as a shining example of Goan temple architecture. The main structure is set in the center of a large courtyard surrounded by apartment buildings that belong to the temple and provide lodging to pilgrims. The deepstamba stands tall in front of the main door. A simple yet charming pavillion made with straw and palm materials is built during festivals, providing shade for the many pilgrims under the inclement Goan sun. (far right) The impressive lamp of Nagesh temple, perhaps the tallest in the world. (right) Rajiv Malik interviews devotees in the calm atmosphere of Sri Mangeshi Temple. (left) The magnificent temple tank.

Though He was far away from where we stood, we could feel the powerful vibrations emanating from the gleaming, beautifully decorated *murti*.

Blessed by His darshan, feeling uplifted and buoyant, we stepped out of the temple to a festive scene. A big tent, made of woven palm tree leaf fibers and colorfully decorated, shaded hundreds of chairs, where devotees relaxed or waited for the queue to subside before they went for darshan. At one end was a stage, ready for live devotional music and *bhajan* performances later in the day. *Bhajan*, *kirtan* and *natak* (drama) are popular here, and Goa has produced many famous Indian classical singers, including Bollywood's sister duo, Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhonsle.

Under the scorching heat, the huge tent was a welcome gesture of thoughtfulness and compassion. Most temples in Goa are similarly well-run, clean and efficiently organized. They are privately owned and managed, free and independent of any kind of government aid. Members of the managing committee are elected every three years from the GSB community.

Temples here are managed with a view to serving their supporting families. The Sri Mangeshi temple campus has several blocks of residential quarters allotted to devotees. Preference is given to the members of any GSB family, whose ancestors have owned and managed most of the prominent temples of Goa for ages.

Though we did not have a prior appointment, Maheshwar A.R. Nagarsenkar, Secretary of the Sri Mangeshi Devasthan, was kind enough to grant us an impromptu audience. We were impressed with the moder-

nity of his office, with a fast internet connection and television monitors covering almost every important area of the temple.

"Mangeshi Temple is under the spiritual guidance of Kavale Math," he told us. "It is managed by its twenty-four founding families, known as Mahajanas. There is no government interference here. Only those belonging to Mahajana families can enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple and perform pujas personally. These twenty-four GSB families have exclusive rights. Outsiders cannot donate for the maintenance and construction of the buildings; their donations are used solely for performing pujas and *archanas* at the temple. But anybody can come to the temple to have the darshan of the Deities."

Mahesh Mangesh Karande, a senior priest, told us the local government's promotion of tourism has been very good for Hinduism. The increased prosperity has strengthened Goans' pride in their own culture; and the tourists themselves, Indians and foreigners alike, want to visit temples and perhaps receive an *archana*. "I am very optimistic about our religion. I can tell you that nobody in this world can destroy Hinduism. The need of the hour, for Goa and the world, I think, is to have religions led by tolerant and good people," said the calm priest, whose life is rich with blessings due to his service of Sri Mangeshi Siva.

Ma Durga, the Mediator

Later that day we proceeded to Shantadurga Temple, dedicated to Goddess Durga. In Goa, Shantadurga is She who mediates between

Vishnu and Siva. The harbinger of peace, the Goddess is always depicted as having the two Divinities by Her sides.

Though not as old as the Sri Mangeshi Temple, this one has a parallel history: it, too, was built to shelter a Deity that was moved to protect it from the Portuguese.

Beautifully maintained, Shantadurga Temple stands on a patio surrounded by guest apartments. Some of the devotee families I spoke with had come from as far as New Delhi and Mumbai. Two senior British women hesitantly approached the temple and asked if they would be allowed to offer flowers to the Goddess. Rowdy, uncultured tourists were nowhere to be seen. The general atmosphere of the temple, with its pious devotees, meticulously kept surroundings and strict dress code, appears to keep the curious and uncommitted away.

The management's rigorous attention to detail seems neither repressive nor inhibiting. On the contrary, we felt inspired and respectful. We spoke with the secretary of Shri Shantadurga Saunsthan, Rajendra S. Gaitonde explained it is the duty of devotees themselves to ensure that they are dressed gracefully, matching the serene and spiritual atmosphere of a Hindu temple. The elders teach the youth and instill in them a desire



to look traditional by wearing appropriate clothing.

GSB members especially are expected to dress impeccably when visiting God, and they oblige. In Goan temples, the supporting families reign.

The local priests, too, are connected to the GSB families. Most are *purohitas*, or family priests. Rajendra S. Gaitonde explains, "The *purohitas* here do not get any wages; they earn by performing pujas. Whatever is given to them directly is theirs. We have two main *purohitas* at Shantadurga Temple. Each one performs pujas for certain GSB families. If a family's *purohita* is absent, they can approach the other priest. This system has been there for ages." The glorious Chidambaram Temple of Tamil Nadu follows a similar system.

Fortune-Telling Flowers

The Damodar temple in Zambaulim, Goa, houses not Krishna Damodar, as does the famous temple in Vrindavan, but rather Damodar Siva. This is a most unusual temple, for here the ancient art of *kaul prasad* is practiced by the priests. This powerful form of divination uses flower petals from a sacred tree in the temple compound to interpret intimations from the Gods. The flowers and petals, scattered in certain ways by the devas as the priest performs special incantations, provide a means of communication between the inner and outer worlds.

Devendra Kenkere, an engineer and real-estate agent, swears by the practice. "This tradition has been here since the time of the grandparents of our grandparents. Sometimes the responses indicate uncertainty, but

at other times they are so clear that you can put fifty lakh rupees on it, even if you only own five cents. This is how it works: Forty-eight flowers are arranged around the Sivalingam, and an *abhishekam* is performed. One has to share with God one's plans and decide which flower represents those plans. If the project receives God's blessings, that flower will not be washed away. Sometimes the flower may not fall for the whole day."

Though *kaul prasad* is also practiced in other temples, Damodar is famous for its accuracy. There are no set fees, but the experienced priests, who can tell much more than a yes or no answer, receive generous donations for their divinations. "I have many personal experiences that I could share," said Kenkere. "Though I had come to ask a different question, by the falling of the flowers the priest predicted my children's health needed care, which came true within days. A knowledgeable priest can infer a lot from the dropping of the flowers. In our whole family, no decision is taken without consulting God here."

Manjunath Pai Duple, President of Damodar Temple, shared some of the secrets of *kaul prasad* divination. "Suppose I have to buy a property; I will come here and put the question before Damodar. If the petal on the right side falls, permission is granted. Every petal or flower has a significance of its own. Reading the flowers is like an encyclopedia, full of details and difficult for the inexperienced to understand. The top flower is called *mukut*, and adjacent to it is called *trikut*. For one person the *mukut* could be good, and for another it might not be good."

Kaul prasad starts at 7:30 in the morning; about twelve *abhishekam* pujas are con-

ducted every day. This beautiful practice of communicating with God through flowers is so highly regarded that even many Catholics attend it, giving large donations to Lord Damodar.

I was invited to the home of a senior trustee of the Nagesh temple, Venkatesh Naik Gaonkar. Within a few hours I was convinced he is a modern-day Hindu saint, immersed in bhakti most of his waking hours.

"We Saraswaths (meaning GSB families) are disciples of Goddess Sarasvati, the Goddess of knowledge," he began. "Though few Goans are GSB today, we are the stewards of spiritual knowledge. The value of knowledge is immeasurable. For the development of human society, it is the most important ingredient, more important than wealth; for the proper management of society is connected to the intelligence of the people."

According to Venkatesh Naik Gaonkar, it was the leadership of the local *maths* that enabled Hinduism in Goa to withstand the turbulence of colonial years. "For 450 years the Hindus in Goa were cut off from the mainstream of Hinduism. But that did not make us lesser Hindus. We were able to preserve our culture mainly due to the influence of our two *maths*, Kavale and Partagal. They give us direction. Starting in 1936, the great Goan Masurekar Maharaj led a movement to bring brahmin Christians back to Hinduism. Now, conversion activities by the Christians are almost over, and even the crowds of hippies did not make much of an impact. We are vibrant Hindus. On Mahasivaratri, 250 *abhishekams* are performed at Nagesh Temple alone, each one sponsored by a pious family."

In most ways Nagesh Temple is similar to

those we visited earlier. An exceptional feature is the extraordinary silver craftsmanship. Silver-clad doors and windows with intricate figurines create a rich and beautiful home for God. This is a *svayambhu* (self-manifested) shrine of Siva Shankara Nagesh, known for its miraculous powers. Worship of the Sivalinga goes father back in time than the memory of the community. Legend says a cowherder discovered the spot, alerted by the reverential attitude of his cows near the stone. A second Deity, Lakshmi Narayan (a form of Vishnu), is equally venerated; this is a Siva-Vishnu Temple.

Mahalasa Temple

The Shri Mahalasa Narayani Temple at Mardol, in South Goa, is a Vaishnava sanctuary. The Deity here is Mahalasa Narayani, an aspect of Lord Vishnu portrayed in a female form. Like so many others, this Deity was moved to protect it from the Portuguese; this one originated in the city of Verna.

In front of the temple stands a unique brass oil lamp, 125 meters tall, which is lit during festival days like the Navaratri (see photo on page 25). This is believed to be the tallest such lamp in Goa—perhaps even in all of India.

Another intriguing feature is a temple bell under which vows are taken. According to local lore, the guardians of the temple will remove their blessings and punish anyone who utters a lie under the bell or breaks a vow taken at that sacred spot. This bell was so widely known and respected that even the Portuguese came here to solemnize their deals with locals.

In olden days, the judicial system of this

area gravitated around the powers of the Mahalasa bell. Several court documents describe the procedure for administering an oath. The accused bathed in the temple tank and was garlanded with red flowers of a plant locally known as *pitkuli*. Then, heralded by loud drums, he was taken to the shrine and made to stand below the bell, facing God, where he might declare his innocence in the presence of the judge, advocates and all others concerned, making a solemn oath of truth.

There is no evidence of any real culprit going free after taking this oath. On the contrary, there are widely known cases in which punishment befell those who dared to take a false oath. Legends say some died right after leaving the temple; others got seriously hurt or went mad.

Kavale Math

The next morning, preparing to visit Goa's leading Smarta *math*, I mused on Goa's connection to the great Adi Shankaracharya, the sage who spoke bravely and influentially of Advaita Vedanta.

Kavale Math was the home of Sannyasin Govinda Bhagavatpada, who initiated Adi Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya's bold words resonated far and wide, but it was at the feet of Govinda Bhagavatpada that he shaped many of his ideas. The founder of the *math* and Govinda's guru, Shri Gaudapadacharya, was an early and staunch *advaitin*. He was the most prominent Vedanta scholar of his time, said to be the first to see the eternal truth revealed in Upanishads as strictly monistic, or *advaita*. Shri Gaudapadacharya wrote the cornerstone treatise *Mandukya Karika* (also called *Gaudapada*

Karika or *Agama Shastra*), which ends with this *shloka*: "Having realized that state of nonduality, which is very difficult to realize, very profound, birthless, uniform and holy, we pay our obeisance to That, to the best of our abilities."

We arrived at Kavale Math to find the place quiet, serene and peaceful. Shrimat Shivananda Saraswati Swami, the current head of the institution, was traveling, so no events were scheduled.

The *math's* sprawling campus houses a temple dedicated to Samsthan Aradhya-devata Shri Bhavani Shankar, an aspect of Siva, and is dotted with the samadhi shrines of several saints who lived here over the centuries. I could feel the strong vibrations of these great souls as we went by, the fragrance of flowers and freshly lit incense emanating from the places where their bodies dwell. By tradition, most Hindu holy men are interred rather than cremated, their mortal remains blessing the world.

Kavale Math also runs a Smarta *pathashala*, a training school of priests.

Ramanavami in Goa

The next morning arrived with an air of festivity: it was Ramanavami, the celebration of Lord Rama's birthday. I was invited to celebrate it at the Shree Samsthan Gokaran Partagal Math. It is one of the 24 monasteries of the dvaita order established by Shri Madhavacharya in the 13th century.

"Our *math* was founded 550 years ago," explains Anil Pai, a trustee of Partagal Math. "Now we have 33 branches all over India, where we run *pathashalas*, hospitals and temples. Around 353 years back we started

Goa's signature-style temples are neatly kept, refreshingly quiet and contemplative



(left) The main hall of Sri Nagesh Temple, where the marriage of European and South Indian styles is evident. (right) The Sri Shantadurga temple. (below) A couple of devotees at the front steps of the Shantadurga temple, Sadasiva and Usha Pandit, who are visiting Goa. Mrs. Pandit, who lives in Mumbai, says, "Our children first come here to the temple, perform puja and then go to the beach for fun."



celebrating Ramanavami in a particular way, a pattern we have followed ever since.”

The *maths* in Goa have friendly, cordial relations. Devotees freely attend festivals of the two main ones, even though Kavale Math is Smarta and Partagal is Vaishnava. “The followers of the two *maths* intermarry their children, which also brings the institutions together,” explains Anil Pai.

Hundreds of small shops line the approach to the *math*, selling sweets, flowers and religious artifacts, all amid lush green surroundings with a mountainous background. Crossing the threshold of the main gate, I felt transported hundreds of years back in time. This venerable *matha*, famous since the 16th century for its Ramanavami celebrations, reverberated with Vedic hymns sung by priests. Elegantly dressed devotees were sitting on the staircase leading to the main stage, an improvised (and packed) open-air auditorium.

Soon a clear silence descended, as thousands awaited the speech given by the head of the *math*, Shri Gokarna Partagal Math-dhish Shripad Wader Shrimad Vidyadhiraj Teertha Swami Maharaj. His words, in the melodious Konkani language, meant little to me; but the crowd listened with rapt attention. Many braved the hot weather under the sun, outside the tents and buildings.

When the speeches were over, the thunderous unison of countless devotees singing “Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram” shook the

building. Chanting, clapping and melodious *nadasvaram* (shrill woodwind) filled the air, and we all felt something special was about to happen. Suddenly, we heard conches blown to their fullest. On the center stage, the head of the *math*, Shrimad Vidyadhiraj Teertha Swami, placed the “newborn baby”—a murti of Lord Rama—in the cradle while the flames of an elaborate arati danced on stage. The very air erupted with myriad sounds of fervor and devotion, including crackers and fireworks. All rejoiced: Lord Rama had arrived in Goa, favorite land of the Gods, where Hinduism shines bright.

The thrill of Rama’s birth celebrations gently subsided as several thousands were served a community meal, some in the open compound and others in the dining halls. A large dedicated team of youth quickly and efficiently served the delicious *prasadam*.

After dinner, I thought I was ready to retire for the day. I was mistaken. As *nadasvarams* started blaring, a contagious excitement ran through the crowd of devotees, myself included. With great fanfare, the palanquin procession was beginning, led by Shrimad Vidyadhiraj Teertha Swami. Three huge wooden chariots, about 22 feet high, carried the *utsava* murtis of Lord Rama and His family. On Lord Rama’s chariot the head of the *math* and a bevy of priests performed an elaborate puja, with flowers abounding. The *nadasvaram* players were still going strong, but I could also hear Vedic mantras once

again being chanted. Thousands watched this unique puja, their hands humbly folded in *anjali* mudra—or else holding their cameras and cell phones up high to capture the magic of the moment. A helpful priest quietly obliged by taking one gadget after another, quickly shooting some close-ups of the puja and returning it to its owner.

After the short puja, Shrimad Vidyadhiraj Teertha Swami and a few others emerged from the tiny temple inside the chariot. Waving and blessing the crowd, they seemed to bask in the devout happiness of the thousands present. Then Swamiji reached for a bag and started pulling out large coins, throwing them with full force to be caught by devotees near and far in the crowd. Some of the coins were of common metal, engraved with religious motifs; a few were made of silver. Priests and trustees on the stage hurled apples, bananas and coconuts. Devotees jumped with joy when they got a fruit falling in their hands, or a coin. Those who received these items immediately shared their blessings with others, cutting the fruit and giving away extra coins. I had never seen something like this in my life, anywhere.

As the warm Goa evening progressed, I joined thousands of others in taking a turn pulling Lord Rama’s chariot, shouldering one of the long, massive ropes. Made of coconut fibers in the ancient tradition, these were many dozens of meters long. My heart opened by the celebrations, I felt blissful,



marveling at sharing in this *punya* (merit).

Far into the night, devotees continued pouring in, arriving for the next day’s festivities. It was going to be an all-night affair, with many foregoing sleep in favor of devotion. The shopkeepers were busy and happy, doing a brisk business and selling more and yet more food. The following morning, we were told, the chariot would be pulled again, covering a much longer distance, powered by the peak crowds that were expected.

Later we had an audience with Shrimad

Vidyadhiraj Teertha Swami Maharaj. Majestically seated on his guru *pitham*, the wise man shared some of his views for readers of HINDUISM TODAY. “Today it is said that our youth do not have faith. We disagree. The youth want to understand Hinduism. If their questions are not properly answered, they will avoid our dharma; but without Hindu dharma, they are bound to problematic lives.” He continued, “In our *math* we emphasize *tapas* and festival vows. But Hinduism cannot be understood with *tapas* alone; it can-

not be understood by experiencing it superficially. You have to delve deeper and deeper in Hinduism.”

Swamiji told me some of the resident brahmacharis and priests love their priestly craft so deeply that they follow a tradition, quite old in Goa, of branding holy symbols on their skin. He sent for some of the young men, and they showed us the chakras and conches that had been etched on their skin, a painful process that also serves as a rite of bravery and a formal initiation. No more than boys, they proudly displayed the sign of their courage, the sacred symbols that made them belong to a holy tradition, symbols that also earned them respect from their peers.

Sand at Last

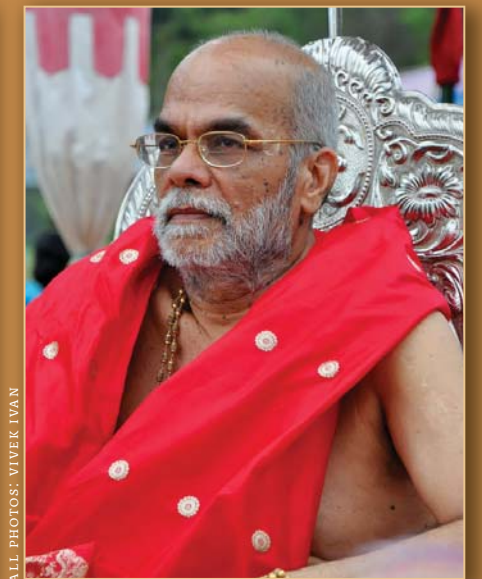
Surfeited with bliss from our many days at Goa’s temples and *maths*, we finally recalled that we were in the land of beautiful beaches and leisure time. We asked our local guide, Gopal Das Ji, to take us to the ocean; my wife, Renu, felt that we should not leave Goa without having visited a famous beach in the capital of beaches. Along with photographer Vivek Ivan, we were driven straight to Calangute Beach.

It was a Saturday and the weekend spirit was alive. The place was crowded. Loud pop music boomed from the restaurants located on the beach. One could barely walk on the sand without bumping into others. It was a mad, suffocating place. After spending barely fifteen minutes at Calangute Beach, my wife whispered, “Let us move away from this place. We have already seen the real Goa.” I could not agree more.



Unique traditions at Goa’s maths

(opposite page) Joy fills the air as hundreds of devotees gather to pull the massive festival chariots with distinctively local decorations. (top) From the palanquin attached to the festival chariot, a vehicle that carries the murti of Lord Rama, the head of Partagal Math and others distribute *prasadam* and blessed coins. (far right) Shrimad Vidyadhiraj Teertha Swami follows the celebrations from his silver throne. He is the senior advisor and final arbiter on religious matters for many temples in Goa and has been the leader of this monastery for over five decades. (right) A young man proudly displays religious symbols he chose to have branded on his skin, an old tradition of the *math*, such as Lord Vishnu’s conch (inset).



ALL PHOTOS: VIVEK IVAN

Hindu of The Year 2011



SRINGERI SHARADA PEETHAM / RAJESH KRISHNAN



SRINGERI SHARADA PEETHAM



A fortress of dharma: (left) Sri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji, the 36th Jagadguru Shankaracharya in the unbroken lineage of the Dakshinamnya Sri Sharada Peetham; (inset) Sri Sarada Devi, presiding Goddess of Sringeri. (above) The Vidyashankar Temple, built in the 14th century over the samadhi of the 10th Jagadguru of Sringeri, Sri Vidya Tirtha, a renowned yogi. Many schools organize field trips to Sringeri, where students have darshan of His Holiness as embodying the spirit of Vedantic philosophy. At right is the bridge approach from across the Tunga River.

The Renaissance Award: Past and Present

On the occasion of his 60th birthday, Sri Sri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji, Jagadguru of Sringeri Sharada Peetham, was presented the 2011 Hindu Renaissance Award as Hindu of the Year in recognition of his patronage of Vedic teaching and scholarship throughout India, his construction of hundreds of temples and his staunch leadership of the global Smarta tradition of Advaita Vedanta. The presentation was covered on live TV, on multiple channels, and viewed across the world. This award was created in 1991 by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, to recognize and strengthen Hindu leaders worldwide.

Previous awardees are Swami Paramananda Bharati ('90), Swami Chidananda Saraswati ('91), Swami Chinmayananda ('92), Mata Amritanandamayi Ma ('93), Swami Satchidananda ('94), Pramukhswami Maharaj ('95), Satya Sai Baba ('96), Sri Chinmoy ('97), Swami Bua ('98), Swami Chidananda Saraswati of Divine Life Society ('99), Ma Yoga Shakti ('00), T. S. Sambamurthy Sivachariar ('01), Dada J.P. Vaswani ('02), Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal ('03), Dr. K. Pichai Sivacharya ('04), Swami Tejomayananda ('05), Ramesh Bhai Oza ('06), Sri Balagangadharanathaswami ('07), Swami Avdheshanand (2008), Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya (2009) and Sri P. Parameswaran (2010).

LINEAGES

A Guru's Birthday Event for Everyone

1,500 Vedic priests gather for 13 days of rites at Sringeri Peetham, honoring the 60th birthday of Jagadguru Sri Sri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji

BY CHOODIE SIVARAM, BENGALURU
WHEN DEVOTEES ASKED THE PONTIFF of South India's preeminent Sringeri Math about holding a 60th-birthday extravaganza for him, Mahaswamiji responded, "We renunciates do not need such festivities; but if these celebrations provide an avenue for divine invoca-

tion, then it is meaningful. These events are for the welfare of the world. Our *sankalpa* (resolve) has always been: "May the people of this land follow righteousness with sincerity and not get swayed by the sinful. May they be freed from hatred, which manifests as cruelty and results in physical harm. Hatred is the root of conflict."

Hindu tradition considers that life begins at conception; thus, the day of birth is considered one's first birthday. The 60th birthday is a special occasion for all Hindus, and pujas are performed for the person's well-being. Mahaswamiji's devotees wanted to celebrate his 60th birthday on a grand scale. Having obtained his permission,

the small town of Sringeri bustled with divine fervor from April 4 to 16 in one of the greatest celebrations in the Peetham's history, honoring Jagadguru Sri Sri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji.

The celebration brought together the whole town. The Peetham ensured that no one was excluded, that every household felt involved in the festivities. Invitations to the festivities were sent to each and every house. Auto rickshaws used loudspeakers to request all to come to the Math. They urged the women not to cook that day and instead have their family take its meals at the Math.

Lanes were filled with hundreds of joyful men, women and children in their best traditional attire: men in dhotis or vesthi, women

draped in silk saris and little girls in *pavadas*. The temple town swarmed with visitors: generations of devotees of the Peetham, VIPs, representatives of prominent religious organizations and temples, journalists, photographers and workers. Most importantly, 1,500 yellow-robed Vedic pandits assembled to perform the many ancient and powerful fire rituals.

Central to the celebration was a series of yajnas and pujas, including the Ati Rudra Mahayajna, three Veda Samhita Yajnas, Mri-tyunjaya Homa, Lakshmodaka Ganapati Homa, Ugra-ratha Homa, Ayushya Homa and Navagraha Homa. These powerful rites culminated in the Ayuta Chandi Mahayajna, conducted for the first time in the recorded

history of Sringeri. This Vedic fire ritual involves ten thousand recitations of *Durga Saptashati* (also called *Devi-Mahatmya*), an exposition on the glory of the Goddess from the *Markandeya Purana*. It is said that difficulties are overcome, diseases cured and wishes fulfilled through the recitation of this sacred text. This powerful ritual requires strict adherence to purity in thought, action and practice from those performing it. For over a year, the *purohitas* had been carefully screened to evaluate not only their expertise in rituals and scriptural knowledge, but their habits and personal discipline as well. Within the Peetham complex, an entire village had been set up for the priests, with all amenities and comforts, to ensure that throughout the



SRINGERI SHARADA PEETHAM/RAJESH KRISHNAN

Priestly Proficiency



Spiritual crescendo: (left) The purnahuti (final offering) of the Ayutachandi Mahayajna performed for the welfare of humanity during the Jagadguru's 61st Vardhanti. The Mahayajna had 1,100 ritwiks (Vedic priests) pouring oblations into 100 fire altars. (above) Students of Sanskrit literature and the priestly arts at the Sringeri Pathashala. Graduates can be broadly classified as 1) vidwans, scholars in Shastras who generally become teachers; 2) Vedic scholars qualified to teach Vedic recitation, 3) purohitas, who conduct Hindu samskaras such as marriage; and 4) priests, who perform puja in temples.

13 days of celebrations they would not leave the sanctified area.

The atmosphere reverberated with sonorous chants as one thousand Vedic scholars recited the Chandi Paatha in unison. Devotees joined in the chanting of the Durga Sap-tashati. The Jagadguru's presence charged the air with Godliness.

On the dawn of the Vardhanti day, April 9, thousands of devotees gathered for Anhika Darshana, the sight of Jagadguru in meditation. This is a rare blessing, as acharyas normally perform their sadhanas in private. Sri Narasimhamurthy explains, "The Anhika Darshana is special and powerful since, during japa, the guru will be in communion

with God. Having his darshan at this time connects us to the Divine; and if the guru's glance falls on us, it augurs well and removes our karma."

On the evening before the finale, heavy rains lashed Sringeri for three hours, bringing down portions of the *yajnasala*. No laborers or volunteers could be allowed inside

the now consecrated space, so priests and trainees worked through the night to repair and restore the temporary structure.

Dr. V. R. Gowrishankar, the administrator of Sringeri Math and its properties, estimated, "In all, about half a million people attended. On April 9, Jagadguru's birthday, 70,000 people received His blessings." The 60th birthday is also called the 61st Vardhanti, from a Sanskrit root meaning "to grow, as the 61st year starts growing on this day.

Indeed, the scale of the event was massive. Many yajnas, *homas* and pujas were carried out simultaneously. The amount of raw materials required was astounding. Dr. Gowrishankar explained, "From the beginning, we had planned for half a million people. This meant, for example, having on hand 150,000 liters of mineral water, 10,000 plates for eating at one time, and another 10,000 for the next group; along with 200,000 banana leaves, also for feeding people. With our detailed planning, we didn't encounter any major problems." Truckloads of wood for the *homas* were offered by the surrounding villages. In return, the Peetham has planted 100 saplings for every tree that was felled.

Guruvandana

On the eve of the Vardhanti, following time-honored tradition, Jagadguru personally performed puja at the shrine of Lord Mahanikarshwara (Siva) after praying at the temples of Sharadamba and Ganapati. Devotees were then given the opportunity to offer personal salutations to Jagadguru, an event called Guruvandana. Thousands of people offered obeisance—devotees from Sringeri, from across India, and hundreds who had traveled from Australia, US, Canada, Middle East and other parts of the world. Offerings were also made by representatives from the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Thirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, Dharmasthala, Kollur Mookambika, BGS and other religious institutions. Dr. Gowrishankar expressed the prevailing mood: "Devotees feel they have received so much by just uttering his name, by his grace, that we must give something as an expression of our devotion and bhakti. Twenty-two years after his ascending the Peetham, this was an occasion to express their gratitude to their guru and benefactor."

That auspicious Vardhanti evening also saw the release of a documentary film on the Jagadguru, "Life and Teachings of an Inspir-

ing Saint;" a pictorial souvenir, *Jagadguru Darshanam*; and a commemoration volume, *Jagadguru Vaibhavam*, containing tributes by eminent scholars and dignitaries.

Serving the Satguru

Being constantly in the company of such a divine presence is a blessing. Those who closely interact with Jagadguru are quick to speak of his grace and mystical powers.

Krishnamoorthy says, "I joined the *pathashala* in 1983. The pontiffs went on an all-India tour, and we went as volunteers. I was thrilled that I could see the various places. In 1987 I was offered the chance to serve Jagadguru as his personal secretary. I got this opportunity because of the accumulation of punya [merit] from my past lives and the devotion of my forefathers."

Now Krishnamoorthy is always by the guru's side as his close confidante, having served him for 25 years. "From the beginning, I decided to remain a brahmachari. The job did not require me to remain a bachelor, but it was my choice. I knew that if I married, my time would be split and I would not be able to dedicate myself completely to my guru. I wanted to devote every minute of my life to

Venerated Founder of the Lineage, Sri Adi Shankaracharya

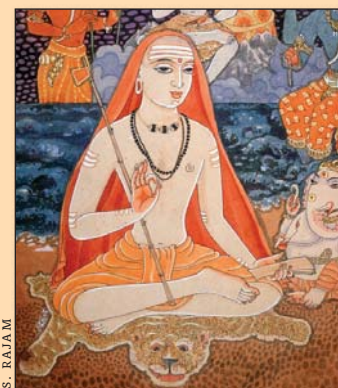
Twelve centuries ago, a young man, having mastered the *Vedas* and *Shastras* by the age of sixteen, traversed India twice, spreading the message of Advaita. One day he came to Sringeri, on the banks of the Tunga River in South India. Here he witnessed a miracle: a cobra spreading its hood to shelter a frog from the scorching sun. Recognizing the power of this place which could transform mortal enemies into protective allies, the monk resolved to start a center of

learning here to promote non-dualism and universal peace. This young man was Sri Adi Shankaracharya. He spent 12 years in the riverside town, establishing the first of his four chief monastic centers, consecrating a temple to Goddess Sharadamba and anointing Sri Sureshvaracharya as the first Mathadhipati (spiritual head).

Their successors continued to spread the message of Advaita. The 12th guru, Sri Vidyaranya, was instrumental in establishing the mighty Vijayanagara

Empire. The 34th Mathadhipati, Sri Chandreshekhara Bharati, had among his devotees the King of Nepal, the president of India and stalwarts from all walks of life.

The present beacon of this illustrious tradition is Sri Sri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji. Ordained into sannyasa in 1974, he has been Jagadguru of Sringeri Math since 1989, when his guru, Sri Sri Abhinava Vidyatirtha Mahaswamiji, attained mahasamadhi.



S. RAJAM

Nondualism's champion: Sri Adi Shankara, ninth century



him, and I have found bliss in doing so."

Narasimhamurthy narrates many incidents which illustrate the blessings Jagadguru has bestowed upon him and other devotees. He offered, "Gurugalu has *vaak* siddhi. His words are prophetic." Pt. Krishna Bhat added, "I've seen a lot of miracles. The way my life has turned out is itself a miracle; whatever work I do for guru is always successful." Another devotee, Ramachandra Sastrigalu, shared, "I lost my parents, property, everything very early. I did not know a single word of the *Vedas* till I was ten. My uncle taught me the *Vedas* and brought me here. Living here, I have found everything. Guru *kripa* and Devi's grace is essential. I am a happy man."

Divine Anecdotes

Shyamsundar Polishetty, a devotee since 1991, affirms, "I don't know how my life began, but I know it will end with Jagadguru. I graduated from college and had gone off track. Father threatened to throw me out of the house if I did not mend my ways. My aunt brought me to Jagadguru. Gururji asked me to prostrate before him. As I did, I don't know what happened, but a profound change came over me. I'm overpowered by Jagadguru and seek his grace for every breath I take. Whenever I travel out of the country, even if it is for a day, I come and seek

his blessings. I have seen so many miracles happen in my life."

N. Sreenivasan, whose association with the Peetham began in the 80s, is India's biggest cement tycoon. He also sits atop India's famous cricket empire. Even in the middle of the crucial IPL cricket season, he participated for two days in the Vardhanti festivities. "Devotion brings me to Sringeri. Jagadguru is an embodiment of abundant love and grace and is an incarnation of Shankara for us. There is never an important festival or event which I miss. I come here to recharge my spiritual account. Every day, I worship Jagadguru's *padukas* (sandals). His benign gaze is sufficient; we should be worthy of his blessings. I derive my strength from Sri Sannidhanam. Whenever there is a crisis, I know He is with me." Cricket legend Anil Kumble seeks divine intervention through Sri Sannidhanam's blessings. "Whenever I come here and seek his blessings, I find peace. He is a guiding force."

Even other monastic orders revere Jagadguru and the Peetham and look to him for guidance. Swami Japananda of Sri Ramakrishna Sevashrama of Pavagada tells us: "The Ramakrishna Order of monks traces its roots to the Math through Paramahansa Ramakrishna's guru, Sri Tota Puri, who carried the Math's legacy. For this reason, even to this day, the Ramakrishna Math monks pay their highest tributes to the Dakshinamnaya

Sharada Peetham."

Swami Dayananda Saraswati of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam opines, "Sometimes the acharyas gain stature because of their *peethams*. In other cases, a *peetham* gains stature because of its acharyas. Sringeri Peetham enjoys the glory of the heritage and also the glory of an exalted acharya."

No Distinctions

The number of devotees visiting Sringeri Math has increased steadily over the decades. The concept that Sringeri Math is a Brahminical institution, not open to outsiders, changes instantly when one observes and interacts closely with it. Over 95 per cent of present-day visitors are of the non-traditional, non-Brahmin classes. Pandit Krishna Bhat observes, "Earlier, people who came were mainly the traditional parampara (lineage) devotees. Now the crowds have increased manifold, and people from all sects and places come to take darshan, often seeking the blessings of good education and intelligence for their offspring. Many vouch that their lives have been transformed through Jagadguru's blessings. They have been spiritualized, and wishes have been fulfilled."

Shyamsundar Polishetty, who hails from the business community, says, "Swamiji named both my children. We sought his blessings for the Anna Prashnam ceremony

Uplifting Communities



Giving inspiration: (far left) Mahaswamiji performs puja during the recent consecration of Sringeri Peetham's new temple to Sri Adi Shankaracharya, who is worshiped as an incarnation of Lord Siva. (middle) Distribution of resources, especially those that help people with a vocation (giving of sewing machines in this picture) occurs during festivals such as Navaratri, Shankara Jayanti and Mahaswamiji's Vardhanti. The Peetham offers financial assistance, service by kind, educational scholarships, health assistance and health care to the needy throughout the year. (right) Future ayurveda physicians come forward for blessings at the PNNM Ayurveda College at Shoranur, Kerala, managed under the auspices of the the Peetham.

(first solid food). Gururji asked us to bring the child to the Adhistana temple, where he himself fed the child and performed the Anna Prashna. Would this have been possible if the Math was purely brahminical? We have never ever felt discrimination by the guru or administration."

Sringeri's auto rickshaw drivers echo similar sentiments. "We are proud to belong here. This is a divine land, and we have Jagadguru protecting us. To us, he is the visible God, and we seek his blessings in everything we do. We have never felt alienated because of our caste. He has been most benevolent towards us; he lends an ear to our difficulties, guides and helps us. We abide by his every word. Every member of this town is treated with warmth and care. Look at the number of people who flock to have darshan and his blessings. This proves that the Peetham is open and fair to all."

Dr. Gowrishankar elaborates, "Eighty percent of our followers are non-brahmins. Even our donations are mostly from non-brahmins. We are an institution meant for human beings. All are welcome here. There are even many Christians who come to our Math and stay here and seek what they want. People from all sects come here, and all are treated equally, without discrimination. Anyone can walk in and have darshan of Goddess Sharada or the Jagadguru. There are

no separate queues, entry fees or discrimination. Representatives from many institutions from different communities come to us to learn, seek guidance and set up their own religious maths." He adds, "Jagadguru dislikes caste discrimination. He believes there is only one creed, and that is the human race."

The Institution

The Peetham is dedicated to promoting non-dualism and Vedic learning, upholding the Smarta traditions and advaita philosophy. Priests and scholars trained in the Sringeri method at the Peetham's gurukula are globally respected. Graduates serve at the Kathmandu Pasupathinath Temple and other ancient shrines.

While holding fast to the strength of tradition, the Peetham has kept pace with modern trends and technology. Its website is promptly updated with Jagadguru's latest discourses and current news of Math activities. The research center boasts a state-of-the-art digital knowledge database. Construction activities continue to expand, building new guest houses for devotees. The large dining hall is served by a highly efficient kitchen, feeding 10,000 people every day.

Sringeri Math has branches across India and abroad. New temples are being built in many cities in the US through the initiative of devotees there. Dr. S. Yegnasubramanian,

founder of Vidya Bharathi Foundation, has been pivotal in expanding the Math's activities in US and Canada.

Dr. Gowrishankar travels to the US and other countries to oversee the Peetham's initiatives and to help bring the devotees together. He has also represented the Peetham at the UN General Assembly. The Jagadguru himself travels regularly across the country. The objective is to spread tradition and the universal truths of Adi Shankara's message. Across India and abroad, the Peetham's affiliate organizations and branches are involved in a wide gamut of socio-cultural activities.

The Gurukula is a place for students and scholars from across the country to learn the *Shastras* and *Vedas* in their purest form and with authentic scholarly rigor. These initiatives are augmented by the Sanskrit Research Centre, which conducts research on ancient scriptures and has helped with reviving, digitizing and printing many rare and lost manuscripts.

For the Peetham, Jagadguru's Vardhanti was an opportunity to re-energize and catalyze all these activities. Dr. Gowrishankar says with a smile: "When we are working under the Guru, we become a part of the family. We all are one. When that sort of closeness exists, everything we ask for happens. We all are happy and smiling, and everything we want, we receive."



Giving Darshan

Holding the center: (left) Sannyasins and Vedic scholars around Mahaswamiji, seen in a contemplative mood on Shankara Jayanti day (May 2010) at Kalady. (right) Mahaswamiji offers a banana to a young girl. He takes great interest in mentoring and guiding children.



Math Administrator, the Adroit, Adept Dr. V.R.Gowrishankar

THE NAME GOWRISHANKAR is synonymous with the Sringeri Peetham. He is the administrator and CEO of Sringeri Math and its properties. Equipped with a degree in management and science, Gowrishankar was carved for a corporate career: "I never dreamt I would become part of the Math. I belonged to a cosmopolitan world. It's a miracle and a blessing that the Goddess and Jagadguru have taken me into their fold." Our interview:

What is the secret of your success at managing the Math and its branches? Maybe my background of having come from a family that has been devoted to the Math for over 150 years and my exposure to the outside world have helped me in doing things this way. I

consider that God and Guruji have given me an opportunity to serve society and the Math. For all the Grace that my family has received from the Math, this is one way of repaying it.

The day His Holiness gave me the Power of Attorney, he told me that if you want to be successful in this post, you will need to have the mental makeup to meet the Prime Minister of this country, speak to him as the administrator of this Math and my representative, and maybe the same day go to a village in a bullock cart and meet people. Both you must be able to do with the same sense of commitment. This strength has come to me only



Poised: Sri Gowrishankar with his family during the 61st Vardhanti celebrations of Mahaswamiji

Math would be counted only by the bank and not by Math staff. There was a lot of opposition initially, but people accepted it. It has now become a common practice among almost every

other institution, to show transparency and accountability. *What have been the new milestones achieved by the Math in the last 10 years?* "The greatest achievement has been the consecration of the Adi Shankara Temple (in Sringeri), built in granite. Throughout India, there is no other separate temple for Adi Shankara.

through Goddess Sharada.

Have other maths benefitted from your experience? In the last 10 years, many maths have been incorporating what we do. We have a leadership role in this sense, and we take this as a responsibility to ensure that we do good things. For example, in 1987, with the blessings of His Holiness, I took a decision that the hundi (donation box) in the

Then there is the temple at Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, US, and two other temples coming up in the US.

We have many educational institutions, including colleges of engineering, medicine and management, and we have a very good hospital in Bangalore.

We also have a hostel for the children of convicts, which is home to 150 children, 90 boys and 60 girls. All of them are doing well; we are seeing to their education completely.

In every institution we support, we make a point of ensuring that its members spend some time in prayers and spiritual development. *Bhagavad Gita* chanting is a common thing. The students of our institutions fare well in society because they are spiritually attuned.

What is the Peetham's greatest strength? The greatest strength of the Sringeri Math is the guru parampara. The spiritual head of the Math never transgresses the boundaries set up by Adi Shankara. Today, whoever who can follow that code commands respect. In the process, we also carry out social work. We know our limitations, and we work to achieve what we can within them. The amount of money we spend annually on charity runs to several million dollars. But we eschew publicity.

What do you see as the role of the Peetham in the 21st century? The biggest challenge is to maintain the heights that we have attained. We have an untarnished 1,200-year-old history, and that must be protected. We must also guide people away from the

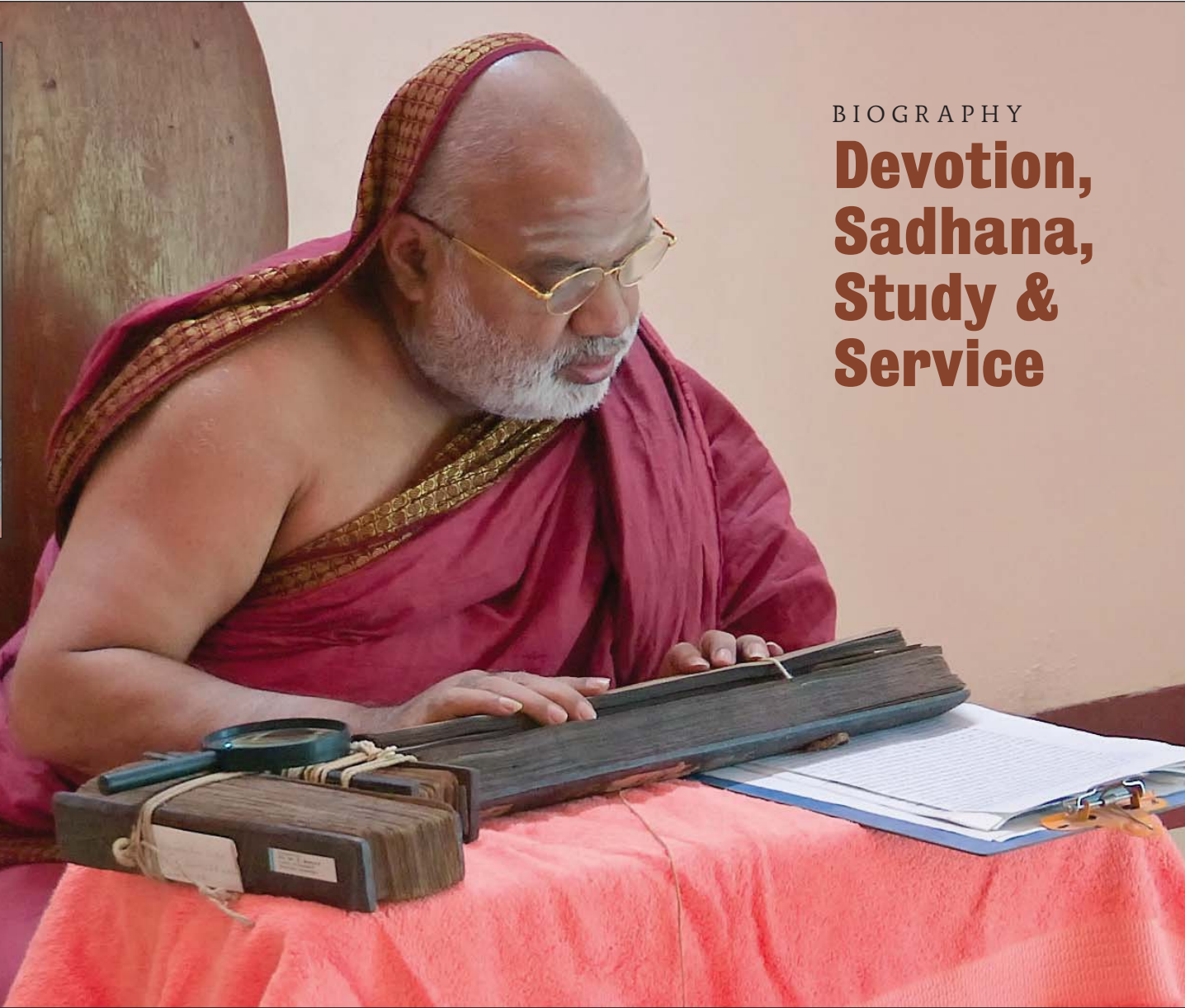
unwanted, harmful influences that exist in society today. We must convince people of the importance of maintaining our traditional values.

What is your advice to administrators of other religious institutions? The person in charge of the institution should have and uphold high values. Only then will people who come to that institution start liking it. For example, if we collect a certain sum for a certain purpose, we use that money only for that purpose. Thus, the donors know that their money is being used properly. When they recognize this and feel a sense of belonging, they are inspired to do more.

That sort of involvement with devotees is the core from which you can build an institution. Otherwise, religious institutions

which depend on donations won't survive for long. Most institutions today try to manage with a scheme to collect money, put it into a trust and use it later for various purposes. The author of each trust created it with certain aims and pushed those aims during his time. The next generation might try to continue with those aims as much as possible, with some changes. But within 50 years, with the third generation, new objectives replace the original goals. Whoever has access to the funds spends them according to his own ideals and aims.

If any institution is to continue in the future the way it is now, it needs the continuity a leader can provide. In our case, we have a guru whom we follow, who continues the original aims from generation to generation.



BIOGRAPHY

Devotion, Sadhana, Study & Service

The Guru: (left) Mahaswamiji peruses ancient palm leaf manuscripts to identify unpublished works that would benefit the Sanskrit world; (inset) in meditation.

tained mahasamadhi, Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji was crowned the 36th Peethadhipathi of the Sringeri Peetham.

During the Guruvandhana, His Holiness explained how he copes with the heavy duties of his position: "When I was ordained by my Guru as the Peethadhipathi, respecting his wish, I had to accept the duties that it entailed. But my nature doesn't agree with anything beyond my spiritual duties and scriptural study. Understanding my limitations, Goddess Sharadamba herself gave me Gowrishankar, who could take over the Math's administrative responsibilities and leave me undisturbed to continue my meditation and study. Because of Gowrishankar, the Math's activities could continue unhindered."

Fluent in many languages, Mahaswamiji guides people throughout India and the world, but he is oblivious to worldly goings-on. Gowrishankar and Krishnamoorthy inform him of important events or developments they feel he should know about. Sri Krishnamoorthy relates, "He tells us, 'Don't give me unnecessary news and information. It intrudes the space in my mind where God should be.' As regards political happenings or anything material, he shuts himself off completely."

Jagadguru follows a rigorous routine. Krishnamoorthy says, "He doesn't sleep or rest through the day; *relaxation* is a word that does not exist for him. He is constantly reading whenever he has time."

Dr. Gowrishankar offered this summary of a typical day in Mahaswamiji's life:

"At 4am Guruji arises. At 4:30: first bath, followed by *anusthana*, a routine of worship and meditation which includes puja to the *padukas* (sandals) of his guru and paramaguru, then *parayana* (recitation) of Sri Adi Shankara's *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*. At 7:00 he visits the samadhi temples of his gurus, then visits the *goshala* and feeds the cows under his personal care. At 8:00 he conducts class for the students of the *Shastras* (Vedanta or Tarka). At 9:30 he guides religious observances in the Peetham, which may include granting darshan (audience) to visiting heads of others Maths (or ashrams) seeking guidance. At 10:30 he gives darshan to devotees. This may continue until noon, depending on the number of people. If it is a Friday, he goes to the temple of Goddess Sharada to offer prayers. At noon, after a second bath, he performs midday prayers and meditation. *Biksha* (lunch) is at 2pm. At 3:00 the Jagadguru teaches a class for scholars and guides research activities related to unpub-

lished manuscripts. These are brainstorming, intellectual sessions on various subjects. At 5:30 he gives darshan to devotees, and at 6:30 he discusses Math affairs with the administrator. At 7:30 he bathes and performs his evening worship and meditations. At 8:15 he performs puja to Chandramouliswara and other Deities traditionally worshiped by all previous Jagadgurus stretching back to Sri Adi Shankaracharya. On Fridays he additionally performs the Sri Chakra puja. At 10 pm Jagadguru retires to his chamber and continues his personal study."

Even when traveling, Mahaswamiji strictly adheres to his worship and meditation routines. It therefore takes three to four days even to reach Bangalore (192 miles) because he travels no more than two to three hours in a day, to ensure that his routine is not upset. Even VIP meetings are fixed during his regular meeting time in the evening, not during any other slot which may come in the way of his Anushtana and religious duties.

Jagadguru follows a strict regimen in food, too: a glass of milk in the morning and night and just one meal a day, at lunchtime. No fruits, snacks or other food. On *ekadashi*, he observes silence and does not even partake of water.

Jagadguru is a passionate and enthusiastic teacher of advaita philosophy and Sanskrit. The eagerness and delight he shows in clarifying doubts of devotees, young and old, is illuminating. He never compromises on teaching time.

Dr. Gowrishankar shared: "The Jagadguru is considered by prominent scholars to be one of the greatest ever exponents of Sanskrit and Sanatana Dharma. His love for the language is so deep that the Mahaswamiji's guru used to joke: 'You just need to tell Swamiji that you love Sanskrit and will immediately become fond of you!' In fact, the first time the Mahaswamiji had the darshan of his Guru (when he was 10 years old), his Guru was thrilled with his command of Sanskrit and recitation of Vedic chants."

The new documentary, "Life and Teachings of an Inspiring Saint," features Mahaswamiji speaking entirely in Sanskrit. Gowrishankar notes, "One of the most common feedbacks I get on the film is: 'I have not studied Sanskrit formally but it is interesting that when the Mahaswamiji speaks, it seems so simple that I seem to understand a lot.'"

Gowrishankar adds, "The Mahaswamiji has edited many critical Sanskrit texts that are valuable resources both to students and advanced scholars. Under Mahaswamiji's direct guidance, the Peetham conducts Sanskrit examinations, for entry level to advanced students, and provides a certification of their skills. More than half a million students have completed and obtained certification through this program."

Despite onerous responsibilities, Jagadguru maintains a simple monk's life

By CHOODIE SIVARAM, BENGALURU

SRI SRI BHARATI TIRTHA WAS BORN ON April 11, 1951, into a traditional Smarta family in the village of Alugumallepadu, near Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. His father, Venkateshwara Avadhani, a Vedic scholar, and his mother had prayed to Lord Siva to bless them with a son. For one year, every day the pious couple performed Ekadasha Rudrabhishekha at Bhavanishankara Temple in their village.

Gurumaa Ananthalakshamma, Jagadguru's mother, lives in a small room in the Peetham complex, eternally immersed in

Rama-nama japa. She considered herself blessed to have witnessed the 61st Vardhanti celebration. With tears of joy, she shared her thoughts during the event: "I feel this place is like Manidweepa, the abode of the Goddess as described in *Soundarya Lahiri*."

Wandering briefly down memory lane, she shared. "His father was a Rama devotee and wanted to name his son Sitarama. I am a devotee of Hanuman and wanted to name him Anjaneya. So we named him Sitarama Anjaneyulu."

Did she know that her son would one day ascend the throne of transcendental wis-

dom? "I knew from the beginning that he was a divine child. When I first saw him, there was a bright light and radiance in his face. From childhood he was distanced from worldly habits and attractions. He would always be reciting God's name. His toys were idols of God, and his games were God-centric. He is the child of the Goddess, not my child. I am only an instrument. She is taking care of everything according to Her wish."

At 15 the young boy traveled to Ujjain and prostrated to Sri Sri Abhinava Vidyatirtha (Sri Mahasannidhanam), expressing his desire to learn the *Shastras* from him. The

great saint agreed. The lessons commenced the next day, with the elder personally teaching the young seeker the *Tarka Sangraha*, an exposition on logic which Jagadguru delights in teaching now. The boy soon became proficient in the *Shastras* and *Vedas*. He was a flawless and focused student. Pandit Krishna Bhat, principal of the Math's *gurukula*, was a fellow student in those days. Bhat narrates, "He was only concerned about the *Shastras* and his studies. He would never discuss worldly matters. Ever helpful, even while talking to his fellow students, he would only ask about their studies and discuss the lessons."

In November 1974, Sitarama Anjaneyulu was anointed by Mahasannidhanam as his successor and given the monastic name Bharati Tirtha. In 1989, when his guru at-

A VISUAL HISTORY

1

India's Kumbha Mela, a spectacular religious festival, is the largest human gathering in history



This Educational Insight is a supplement to our five children's lessons on Hindu and Indian history. Each of the five sections here pictorially presents the key Hindu religious and cultural practices, customs and traditions discussed in the five lessons.



The Ganga River flows past the bathing steps at Haridwar in north India. In 1998, ten million pilgrims worshiped here during the months-long festival. The Kumbha Mela at Prayag in 2001 drew over 60 million Hindus.

An Assembly of Holy Men & Women

The Kumbha Mela brings together tens of thousands of Hindu holy men (*sadhus*) and women (*sadhvis*) as well as millions of devout Hindus, all traveling long distances to experience months of worship and festivities.



Hindu monks parade through narrow streets of Haridwar on their way to the river Ganga for a sacred, purifying bath.



Swami Avdheshanand Giri, under the umbrella, heads a monastic order of hundreds of thousands of *sadhus*.



During the festival, a vast tent city is set up along the river to house the *sadhus*. Here, devotees can meet and mingle with these holy monks, many of whom live alone in remote areas of the Himalayas.



All devotees eagerly immerse themselves three times in the sacred water. They hold on to steel chains to avoid slipping into the swift-flowing river.

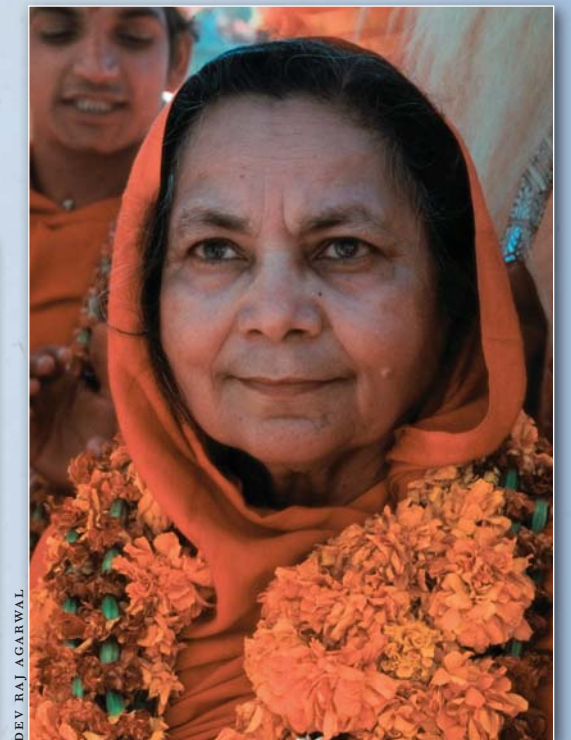


Two girls hold clay oil lamps on metal trays at the 2004 Kumbha Mela in Ujjain, one of Hinduism's "Seven Sacred Cities." These lamps will be used in the worship of the Kshipra River flowing behind them. Hindus often

attend the Mela in large family groups composed of kids, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. There is something for everyone in the traditional worship and festive ceremonies.

A Time to Consult the Wise

Leaders (below) gather for a summit during the 2004 Mela at Ujjain to discuss philosophy and current Hindu issues. At the 1974 Kumbha Mela, Ma Yoga Shakti (right) was named a Maha Mandaleshwar, chief religious leader, one of the first women given this high honor in modern times.



Understanding Kumbha Mela

1. **Explain:** Why do you think the Kumbha Mela attracts so many Hindus?
2. **Discuss:** In religions other than Hinduism, how do children and youth participate in festivals?
3. **Explain:** Why is bathing part of the religious ritual at

- the Mela? What parallels do you see in Christian baptism and Muslim washing before prayers?
4. **Discuss:** If you were at the Kumbha Mela, what questions would you ask the Hindu leaders at one of their summits?

A VISUAL HISTORY 2

Hindus celebrate more festivals each year than followers of any other religion. Let's visit a few of them.



KRISHNA JANMASHTAMI: On Lord Krishna's birthday, two teams in Mumbai compete to break pots full of red-dyed yogurt hung high above the street. They are celebrating a favorite story of Krishna's childhood. He once climbed up to steal yogurt from the pot His mother had hung high in the kitchen to keep away from the children. The scene is shown in the Suvridha banners on the lamp posts at left and right. The team in yellow is getting close to the pot and a big cash prize. Thousands of such contests are held across Mumbai during the festival.



A winning reach results in a shower of colored yogurt upon the human pyramid below.

HERE'S A REALLY COLORFUL FESTIVAL

HOLI celebrates the victory of the devout child Prince Prahlada over the demoness Holika. It falls on the last full moon of February/March. It begins with bonfires in the evening and is followed the next day by the smearing of one and all with colored powders and splashing with colored water.



1 "You're sure we won't get in trouble for this?" Kindergarten children pick up handfuls of powder to smear on each other.

2 A variety of children's water guns are put to colorful use upon family and friends during Holi.

3 These teens are targeting each other, but any bystander, including complete strangers, could be next.

4 A temple courtyard is deluged with colored water and powders as hundreds of devotees play Holi.

DIWALI: THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

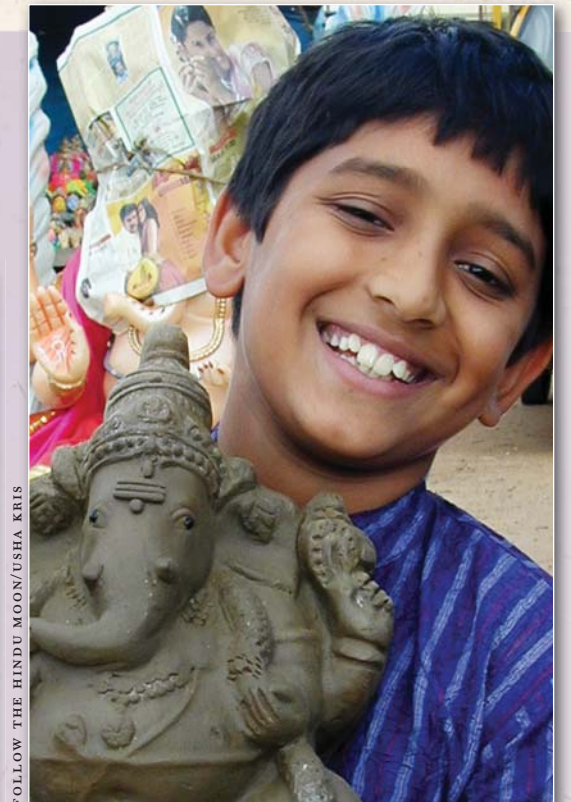


This biggest festival of the year is celebrated across India and everywhere Hindus live in the world today. It is held in October-November. Oil lamps are lit and placed in and all around the home, new clothes put

on and gifts exchanged. In parts of India it also marks the beginning of the New Year. Various stories are told of its origins, all involving the victory of light over darkness, good over evil.

THE ELEPHANT GOD'S 10-DAY-LONG CELEBRATION

Ganesha Chaturthi is held in August/September. The boy at right has purchased a clay *murti* of Ganesha which he will paint and keep on the family home altar. In Mumbai (below) huge Deities are built, paraded through the streets and on the final day immersed in the ocean.



Exploring Religious Celebrations

1. **List:** Name major festivals from other religions and show what they have in common with Hindu festivals.
2. **Discuss:** Why do you think lamps, candles, fireworks and bonfires are a part of many festivals?
3. **Explain:** How does a festival such as Holi help keep people on good terms with each other?
4. **Evaluate:** Do you think the celebration of religious festivals benefits the community? Why or why not?

India's dance traditions are living expressions of ancient religious stories

This is Pung Cholom, a dance from Manipur, in India's northeastern corner. These boys first learned to play the double-headed pung drum, then how to dance while playing it—a complex feat indeed! This is one of India's most energetic dances.

EMOTIONS IN DANCE

Most Indian dances include the nine basic emotions: love, joy, wonder, peace, anger, courage, compassion, fear and disgust. At right a Bharata Natyam dancer demonstrates five of them.

ALL PHOTOS: DINODIA.COM



fear



wonder



compassion



peace



disgust



DINODIA.COM

KATHAKALI: This dance form from Kerala is famous for its elaborate costumes and makeup, which take hours to apply. The lamp in front is always present (in the old days it helped illuminate the dance). The stools are

props used during the performance. The singer in the back is narrating the story. The dance dramas are often taken from the epic *Mahabharata*. Performances used to run all night, but are now about three hours long.

CLASSICAL AND FOLK DANCES

In 1991, the Indian Post Office released stamps commemorating four of the country's folk dances: (clockwise from top left) Valar, Kayang, Velakali and Hozagiri. (right) A 2009 Kathak performance by Chetna Noopur at Noopur Performing Art Centre, Bengaluru.



Dance Tradition

1. **Interpret:** Why do you imagine India developed such a rich array of dance forms?
2. **Discuss:** What advantages would watching a religious dance drama have over reading the drama in a book?
3. **Explain:** How do a dancer's facial expressions

- and hand gestures help tell a story?
4. **Analyze and debate:** What role does dance play in conveying Hinduism from one generation to the next?



NARAYANI PEEDAM

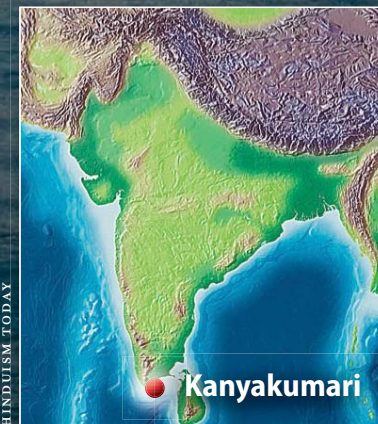
A VISUAL HISTORY 4

Monuments to two saints—one ancient, one modern—proudly stand at India’s southern tip



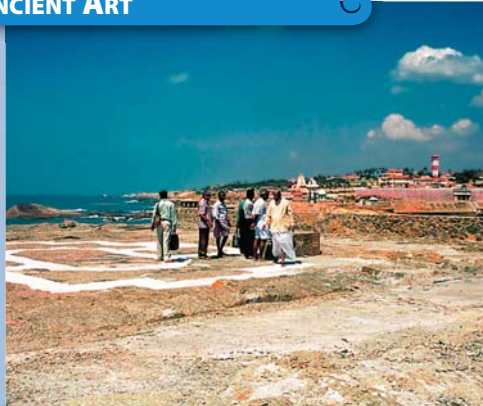
Two memorials stand on islands off the coast at India’s southernmost point, Kanyakumari. On the opposite page is the Vivekananda Rock Memorial. In 1892, Swami Vivekananda, at the time a wandering monk, swam thousands of yards out to this island. After fasting and meditating there for three days, he had a vision of his life’s

mission. He saw how to overcome the terrible impact of British colonization on Hindu self-esteem. Above is the 133-foot-tall granite statue of a saint named Tiruvalluvar. He lived 2,000 years ago and wrote the *Tirukural*, a work of 1,330 couplets about religion, friendship, vegetarianism, moral living, business, government and even war.



THE STONE MASON'S ANCIENT ART

The Tiruvalluvar statue is made of 3,681 stones and weighs a total of 6.4 million kilos. It was built by 150 sculptors and laborers using carving techniques more than a thousand years old. They completed the work on January 1, 2000.



1 The chief architect lays out the statue's foundation after the granite rock of the small island has been leveled

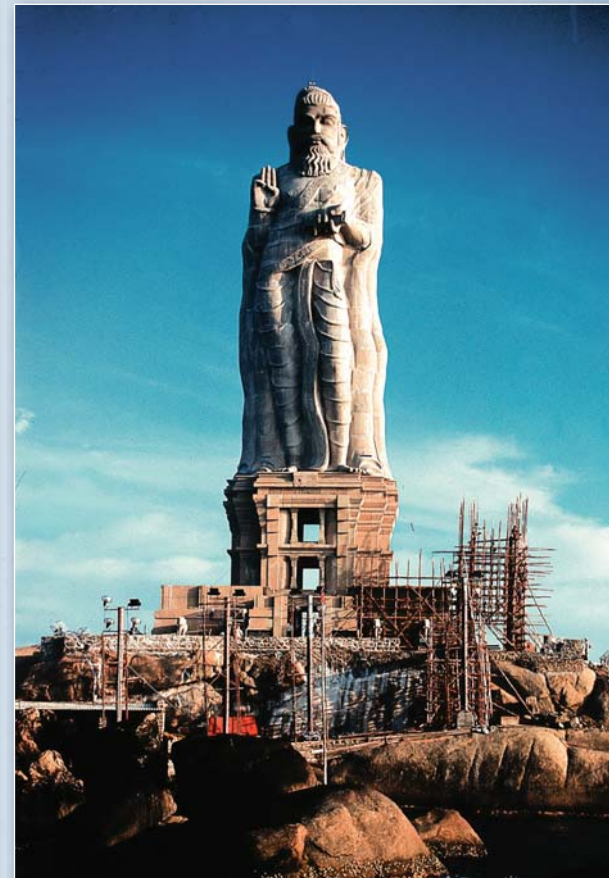
2 Using a massive chisel, workers shape a large granite stone weighing several tons

3 Blacksmiths at the worksite manually sharpen steel chisels by the hundreds every day for the stone carvers

4 A stone mason puts finishing touches on one of the saint's enormous feet



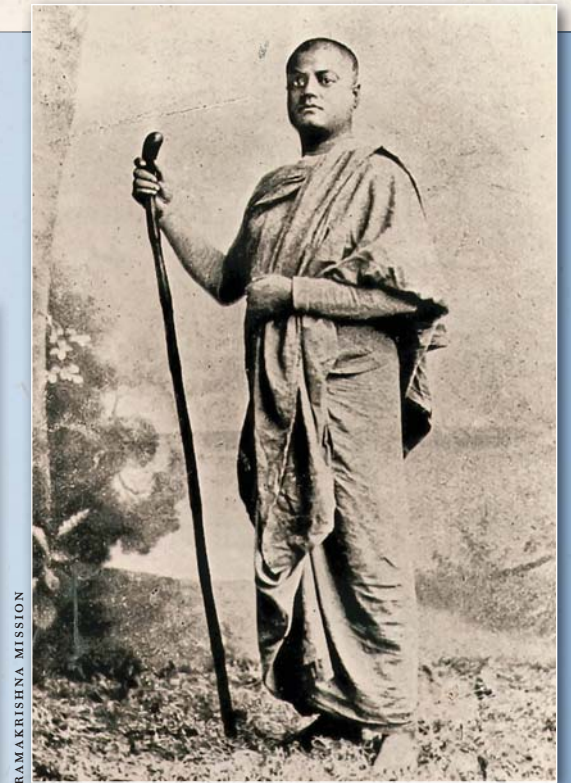
5 Saint Tiruvalluvar's face is 19 feet high. Each stone was lifted into place with ropes and pulleys fixed to a scaffold of strong palm trees.



6 Every worker, rock and piece of equipment had to be ferried to the small island by boat. In the 1999 photo above, the grand statue was nearly finished. Its total cost: 1.4 million US dollars.

HINDUISM'S PIONEER MONK TO THE WEST

In the early 1890s, Swami Vivekananda (right) wandered India without a penny to his name. He represented Hinduism at the Chicago Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893, where he gave a rousing speech about the glories of India. He was later welcomed by the rich and educated of America (below) and England as an extraordinary religious figure.



Honoring History's Great People

1. **List:** Name the large monuments to individuals you know of.
2. **Discuss:** What are a few reasons for building monuments to famous people?
3. **Explain:** Why do you think a poor monk from India

- was able to make such a dramatic impression on people in America and England?
4. **Analyze and Comment:** Who would you choose to honor with such a monument? Why?

Hindu people and Hindu ideas can be found today in nearly every country of the world

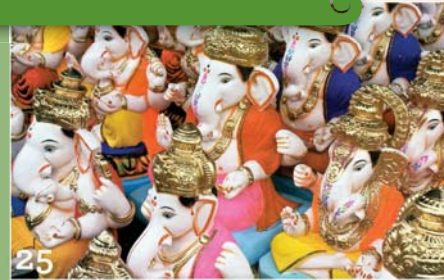


WHERE ONE BILLION HINDUS LIVE: Hinduism originated in the Indian subcontinent—now the modern nations of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Most of the world's Hindus live in these countries today. A thousand years ago, Hinduism spread across Southeast Asia to Vietnam and the Indonesian islands.

Then in the 19th century, Hindus were taken as workers to European colonies such as Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, Reunion, Mauritius and South Africa. In modern times, Hindus have migrated to most countries of the world. Once settled, they have built temples for public worship to strengthen their religious life and express their faith.

IN OUR WORLD

Hindu philosophy teaches a deep tolerance and all-encompassing respect for other faiths. This attitude has a natural appeal in today's world, where people seek to live in peace with one another.



25 WE ARE ALL HINDUS NOW

NEWSEWER
BY LISA MILLER
America is not a Christian nation. It was, it is true, a nation founded by Christians, and according to a 2008 survey, 78 percent of us continue to identify as Christian (still, that's the lowest percentage in American history). Of course, we are not a Hindu-Muslim, or Jewish, or Wiccan-nation, either. A million who Hindu live in the

way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." Americans are no longer buying it. According to a 2008 Pew Forum survey, 45 percent of us believe that "many religions can lead to eternal life"—including 37 percent of white evangelicals, the group most likely to believe that salvation is theirs alone. Also, the number of people who seek spiritual truth

ally believe that bodies and souls are sacred, that together they comprise the "self," and that at the end of time they will be reunited in the Resurrection. You need both, in other words, and you need them forever. Hindus believe no such thing. At death, the body burns on a pyre, while the spirit—where identity resides—escapes. In reincarnation, central to Hinduism,



ZUMA WIREWORLDPHOTOS

Lisa Miller's 2009 *Newsweek* article detailed America's shift to Hindu ideals, such as respect for all religions.

The Hindu practice of yoga is common in Western schools and many public centers for exercise, health and relaxation.



GLOBAL FORUM

Delegates from 60 nations at the 1988 Global Forum in Oxford, England, discussed the future of our planet. The contributions of the Eastern religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism, were given equal importance with those of the West.

SIX KEY HINDU IDEAS FOR TODAY



1. Respect for all religions

"Truth is One, Sages describe It variously."
Rigveda, 1.164.46



4. Reverence for the environment

"The Earth is our mother, we are all Her children."
Atharva Veda 12:1:12



2. The presence of God in everyone and everything

"God is, in truth, the whole universe: what was, what is and what beyond shall ever be. He is in all."
Krishna Yajur Veda, Shvetashvatara Upanishad 3.15-16



5. Karma, the result of our actions, returns to us

"Whatever deed he does, that he will reap."
Shukla Yajur Veda Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5



3. Ahimsa, doing no harm

"You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever."
Yajur Veda 12.32



6. Life's purpose is God Realization

"Lead me from unreality to reality. Lead me from darkness to light. Lead me from death to immortality."
Sukla Yajur Veda Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28

YOUR MAJESTY AND MR. PRESIDENT, MEET HINDUISM

In 2002, England's Queen Elizabeth II was greeted by the priests of Highgate Hill Murugan Temple in London in the first-ever royal visit of a monarch to a Hindu temple. (right) In 2010, Barack Obama became the first US president to personally celebrate Diwali in the White House.



AFP



COURIER-JOURNAL.COM

Examining Hinduism Today

1. **Discuss:** What is important about a political leader visiting a religious place or celebrating a religious festival?
2. **Discuss:** What is the difference between respecting another religion and tolerating it?
3. **Explore:** How do other religions express the concepts

- in our list of six key Hindu ideas? Which ideas would be acceptable to people with no religion?
4. **Analyze and Defend:** What role do you think religion should play in today's world?

Four^{more} Questions People Ask About Hinduism

...and four tweetable answers!

In this addendum to our popular booklet "Ten Questions People Ask About Hinduism," we address four new hot-button issues: "Is yoga a Hindu practice?" "How do Hindus view other religions?" "Why do some Hindu Gods have animal features?" and "Why do Hindus cremate the dead?"

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN PUT ON THE SPOT WITH A provocative question about Hinduism, even one that really shouldn't be so hard to answer? If so, you are not alone. It takes some good preparation and a little attitude adjustment to confidently field queries on your faith—be they from friendly co-workers, students, passersby or especially from Christian evangelists. Back in the spring of 1990, a group of teens from the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont, sent a request to HINDUISM TODAY requesting "official answers" to nine questions they were commonly asked by their peers. These questions had perplexed the Hindu youth themselves; and their parents had no convincing answers. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami took up the challenge and provided answers to the nine questions. Years later we added a crucial tenth dialog on caste, since that is the most relentless criticism Hinduism faces today. We now add four more, to round out the series.

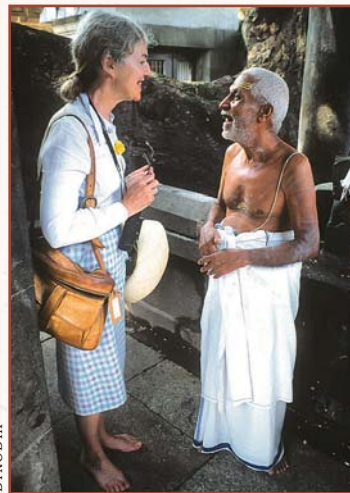
Let's begin with advice on the attitudes to hold when responding. First, ask yourself, "Who is asking the question?" Millions of people are sincerely interested in Hinduism and the many Asian religions. So, when asked about Hinduism, don't be defensive, even if the questioner seems confrontational. Instead, assume that the person really wants to learn. Of course, some only want to harass, badger and turn you to their view. If you sense this is the case, feel free to smile and courteously dismiss yourself without any attempt to answer, lest you simply add fuel

to his fires.

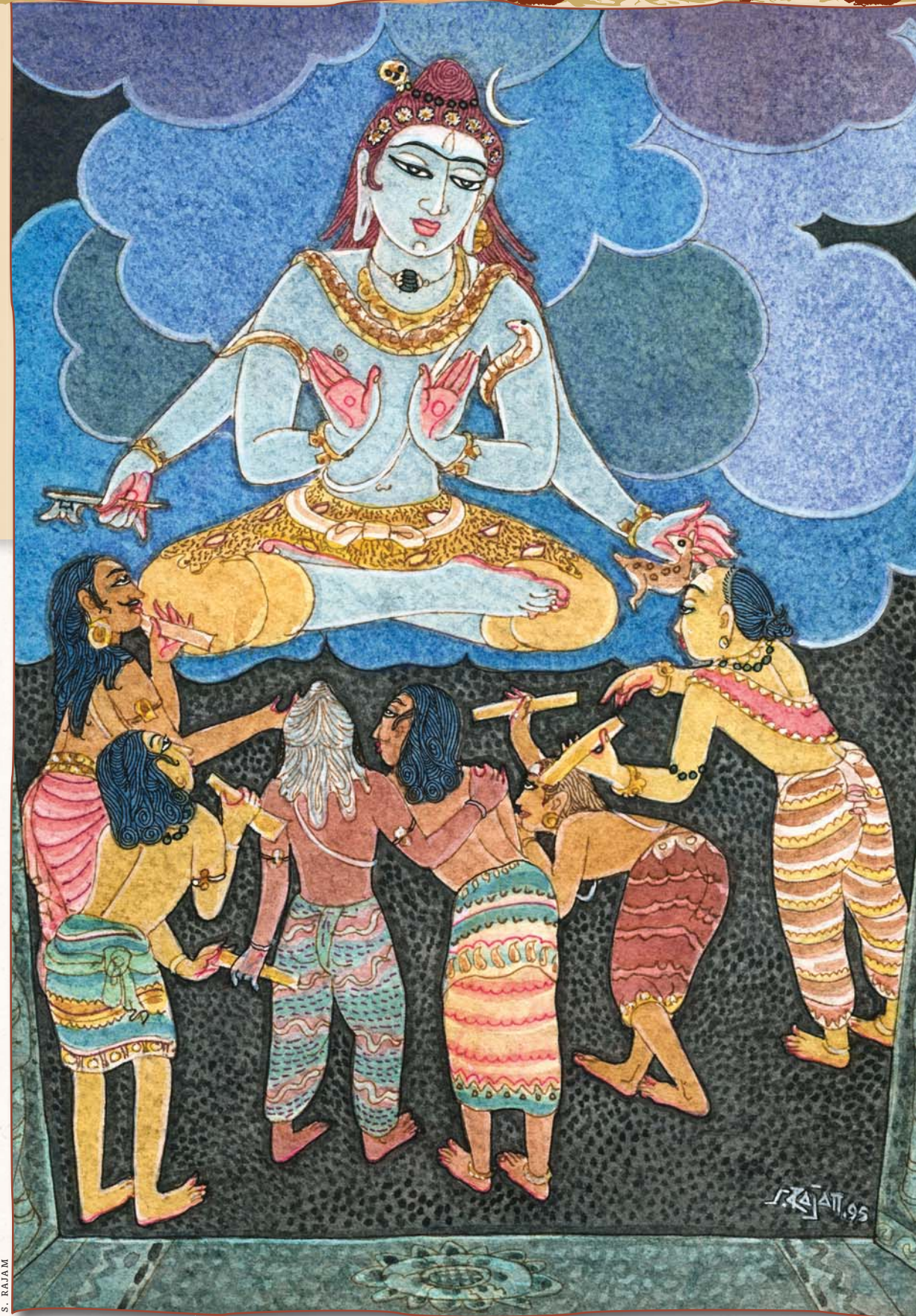
Bearing this in mind, it is still best never to answer a question about religion too boldly or too immediately. That might lead to confrontation. Offer a prologue first, then come to the question, guiding the inquirer toward understanding. Your poise and deliberateness gives assurance that you know what you are talking about. It also gives you a moment to think and draw on your intuitive knowing. Before going deeply into an answer, always ask the questioner what his religion is. Knowing that, you can address his particular frame of mind and make your answer most relevant. Another key: have confidence in yourself and your ability to give a meaningful and polite response. Even to say "I am sorry. I still have much to learn about my religion and I don't yet know the answer to that" is a meaningful answer. Honesty is always appreciated. Never be afraid to admit what you don't know, for this lends credibility to what you do know.

Here are five prologues that can be used, according to the situation, before you begin to actually answer a question. 1) "I am really pleased that you are interested in my religion. You may not know that one out of every six people in the world is a Hindu." 2) "Many people have asked me about my tradition. I don't

know everything, but I will try to answer your question." 3) "First, you should know that in Hinduism, it is not only belief and intellectual understanding that is important. Hindus place the greatest value on experiencing each of



A visitor to India questions an elder about temple ceremonies and various Hindu customs



Lord Siva sits in his world of light, approached by petitioners who have scribed questions on palm leaves, as in the days of yore

these truths personally." 4) Repeat the question to see if the person has actually stated what he wants to know. Rephrase it and ask if you have understood his query correctly. 5) If it's a complicated question, you might begin by saying, "Philosophers have spent lifetimes discussing and pondering questions such as this, but I will do my best to explain."

Have courage. Speak from your inner mind. Sanatana Dharma is an experiential path, not a dogma, so your experience in answering questions will help your own spiritual unfoldment. You will learn from your answers if you listen to your inner mind. This can actually be a lot of fun. The attentive teacher always learns more than the student.

After the prologue, address the question without hesitation. If the person is sincere, you can ask, "Do you have any other questions?" If he wants to know more, then elaborate as best you can. Use easy, everyday examples. Share what enlightened souls and scriptures of Hinduism have said on the subject. Remember, we must not assume that someone who asks about Hinduism is insincere or is challenging our faith. Many are just being friendly or making conversation to get to know you; others, having reincarnated into a strange culture, are searching for the way back "home." So don't be on the defensive or take it all too seriously. Smile when you give your response. Be open. If the second or third question is on something you know nothing about, you can say, "I don't know. But if you'd like, I will find out and email you what I find out." Smile and have confidence as you give these answers. Don't be shy. Your birth karmas ensure that nobody can ask you a question to which you are unable to provide a fine answer that will fully satisfy the seeker. You may make lifelong friends in this way.

In the following pages, each question is addressed by a short response that can be committed to memory, a longer answer, and a detailed explanation. Many questioners will be content with the short, simple answer, so start with that first. Use the explanation as background information for yourself, or as a contingency response in case you end up in a deeper philosophical discussion.

To order the booklet with all fourteen questions and other Hindu literature, email: pamphlets@hindu.org. Additional resources can be found at: www.himalayanacademy.com/basics/.

1

Is yoga a Hindu practice?

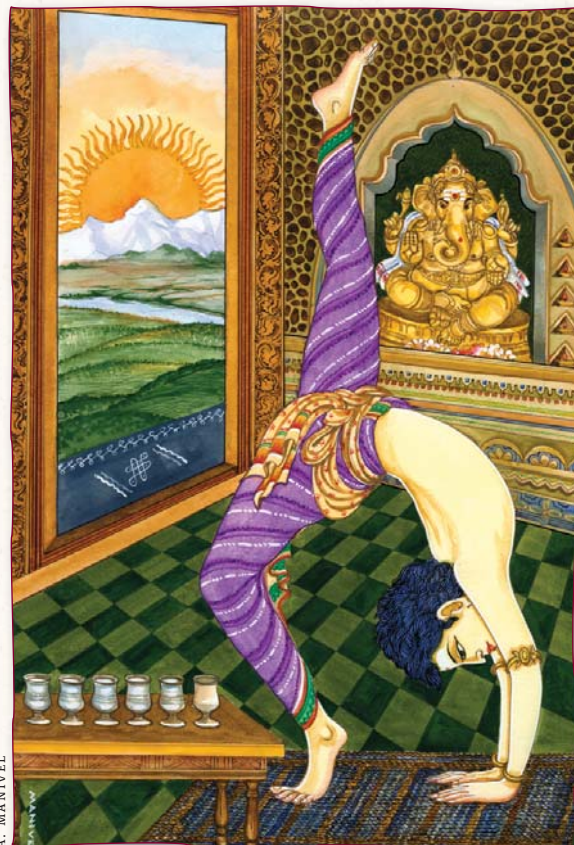
Deeply rooted in Hindu scripture and belief, yoga is, and always was, a vital part of Hindu religion and culture. Today it is embraced by tens of millions of non-Hindus seeking its renowned benefits to physical, mental and spiritual health.

IN RECENT YEARS A VIGOROUS DEBATE has arisen as to whether yoga is intrinsically a Hindu practice or a universal science. The word *yoga* has changed as the practice moved west. Its original meaning, "union with God," has been replaced with the more secular definition presented by upscale yoga studios around the world that teach a regimen of asanas along with basic breathing and a little meditation. A typical studio ad focuses on the physicality, stating that "yoga increases the circulation of oxygen-rich blood, nourishing and detoxifying the internal organs, musculature, cardiovascular, immune, endocrine, digestive, reproductive and nervous systems." The United States alone has over 20 million practitioners, and there are hundreds of millions worldwide.

B.K.S. Iyengar, a renowned yoga teacher, gives a more traditional definition on his website: "Yoga is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. The word *yoga* originates from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means 'union.' On the spiritual plane, it means union of the Individual Self with the Universal Self."

Elaboration: The term *yoga* actually refers to a wide range of Hindu practices; so it is important to specify what kind of yoga is being discussed. In common modern usage, *yoga* typically refers to hatha yoga—the performance of yoga postures, or asanas, which are drawn from ancient Hindu scriptures. Hatha yoga has always been performed by Hindus as a preparation for meditation; today, especially in the West, its health benefits commonly supersede the spiritual. Hatha yoga is just one facet of a broader body of knowledge and practice known as *ashtanga* yoga, which consists of eight stages. (*Ashta* means eight; *anga* means limb). The famous *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, who lived around 200 bce, is considered the first systematic presentation of the ancient tradition of yoga.

To appreciate yoga's spiritual and religious nature, one need only



At dawn a devotee practices an advanced hatha yoga asana as part of a series that will prepare him for meditation. Each day in his shrine room, he follows a one-hour spiritual routine of yoga, worship and meditation.

consider each of its eight limbs, or facets. The first is *yama*, the ethical restraints; of these, the most important is ahimsa, noninjuriousness. The second is *niyama*, specific religious observances, including puja in one's home shrine and repeating mantras. The third is asana, the widely practiced hatha yoga postures. The remaining five limbs are all related to meditation: pranayama (breath control), *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (illumination, or oneness with God).

Can those of other faiths benefit from the practice of yoga—without threatening their religion's beliefs? Certainly followers of liberal religious traditions can do so. However, clerics of conservative faith traditions have spoken against its practice for their adherents. For example, in 2008 the leading Islamic council in Malaysia issued an edict prohibiting the country's Muslims from practicing yoga. Council chairman Abdul Shukor Husim explained: "We are of the view that yoga, which originates in Hinduism... destroys a Muslim's faith. There are other ways to get exercise. You can go cycling, swimming, etc."

The Reverend Richard Farr, vicar of Saint Mary's Church in Henham, England, commented in 2001: "I ac-

cept that for some people it is simply an exercise. But it is also often a gateway into other spiritualities, including Eastern mysticism." The Vatican has issued numerous edicts about the pursuit of yoga. In 1989 it warned that practices like Zen and yoga can "degenerate into a cult of the body" that debases Christian prayer.

It is sometimes argued that yoga is not Hindu *per se*; only the roots are Hindu. The fact that yoga is pursued by many non-Hindus is irrelevant to its validity as a Hindu practice. The roots of yoga, its scriptural origins, are Hindu. The stem of yoga, its practice, is Hindu; and the flower of yoga, mystical union with God, is Hindu. Yoga, in its full glory, is entirely Hindu. Practice at your own risk!

2

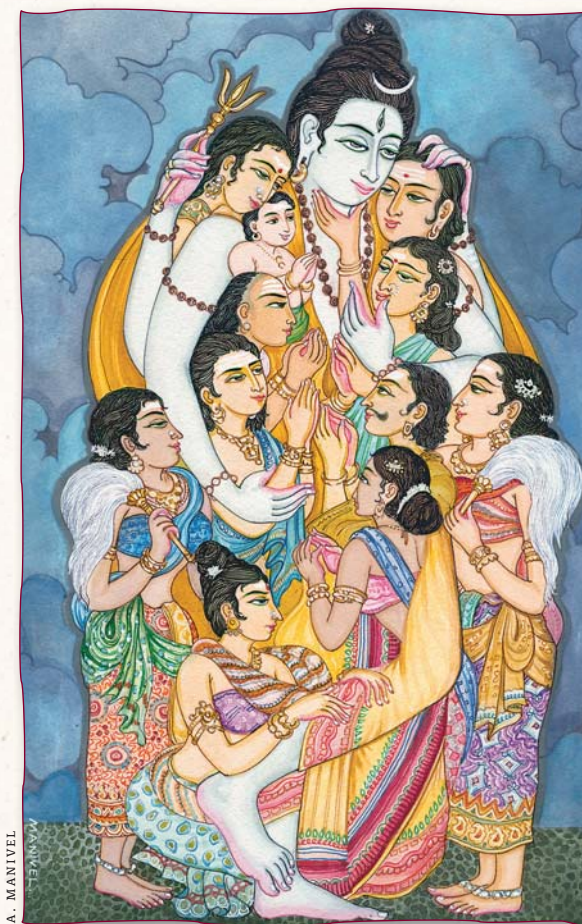
How do Hindus view other religions?

Hindus honor all religious traditions and the people within them. While regarding our faith as uniquely endowed, we believe that there is no exclusive path, no one way for all.

IN INDIA, WHERE HINDUS ARE THE overwhelming majority, the rights of minority religions have always been honored. Hindus have welcomed, embraced and lived peacefully among other religions for centuries. During those same centuries, Hinduism itself evolved into hundreds of strains, and thus Hindus are fully at home with many different traditions and viewpoints within their own faith. Hence, they are naturally tolerant of other religions, respecting the fact that each has unique beliefs, practices, goals and paths of attainment, and not objecting when the doctrines of one conflict with those of another. Hindus readily accept the idea that it is not necessary, desirable or even possible for everyone to hold the same beliefs. And certainly such differences should never be cause for tension, criticism, intolerance or violence.

An ancient Sanskrit verse summarizes the Hindu attitude: "As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

Hindus do not proselytize, meaning they do not try to convert members of other faiths to their own. Proselytizing is based upon the belief that one's religion is the only true religion and everyone else should join it. Hindus hold the view that all faiths are beneficial. A devout Hindu is supportive of all efforts that lead to a pure and virtuous life and would consider it unthinkable to dissuade a sincere devotee from his chosen faith. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations. While encouraging others to follow their chosen path with dedication, Hindus hold Sanatana Dharma to be the fullest expression of religion, and do accept sincere souls who seek entrance into Hinduism.



Here the artist depicts the intimate affection between God Siva and humanity. All are embraced, accepted and loved, whatever path they follow, whatever religion they profess.

Elaboration: When discussing other religions, Hindu leaders often quote a verse from the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46): "Ekam Sat, viprah bahudha vadanti," meaning "Truth is One, sages describe it variously." It conveys a core Hindu idea: that there can be multiple valid viewpoints about the Supreme. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, philosopher and former president of India, stressed this point: "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it."

In expressing religious tolerance, Hindus sometimes cite the above verse to assert that all religions are the same. In reality, all religions are not the same, nor is that indicated by this verse. It simply says that all religions revere the One Truth; all believe in the One Supreme Being. Their beliefs and practices are different; their paths are distinct. Instead of saying, "All religions are the same," it is better to state that "all religions are good."

Hindus share values common to all faiths: piety, love of God, respect for tradition, a stress on duty, responsibility and basic human virtues, such as nonviolence, truthfulness, compassion and charity. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations. They also acknowledge and honor the many ways that religions differ. For example, meditation and yoga are commonly practiced in Eastern religions but not usually in Western faiths.

The heart of a religion is its understanding of the soul's relationship to God. Hinduism and most Eastern religions believe that, at the highest level, God and soul are one, inseparable, while Western faiths maintain that Creator and creation are eternally distinct.

Hindus support and participate in ecumenical gatherings with other religions, while upholding their own traditions. They confidently defend their faith, proceed contentedly with their practices and avoid the enchantment of other ways, be they ancient or modern.

3

Why do some Hindu Gods have animal features?

In dreams and visions the inner-plane beings have revealed themselves to mankind to be of many forms, expressing many powers. Some appear human, and others, like Ganesha, have animal features.

THE VARIOUS GODS IN HINDUISM'S wide-ranging traditions possess distinct personalities and forms based on how they have been seen in visions and how they are depicted in stories and legends. Hindus feel no need to question the fact, for instance, that Lord Ganesha has the head of an elephant. They know He has been seen in this way by rishis and even by ordinary devotees. Did He choose that form to distinguish Himself as the Lord of Obstacles? No one really knows. The important fact is that millions of Hindus worship and receive blessings from the benevolent Elephant-Faced God every day. Many Hindus seeking an explanation hold that Ganesha is a real being who looks like an elephant. Others believe the elephant form is symbolic. Millions are content with the ancient stories in the *Puranas* that explain how He came to have an elephant head. Interestingly, and perhaps because of His endearing visage, Ganesha is the most popular of all the Hindu Deities. Numerous other Hindu Divinities have animal attributes, including Hanuman, Varuna, Kamadhenu, the Nagas, the *vahanas* (animal mounts of the Gods) and four of Vishnu's ten incarnations (fish, turtle, boar and half-man-half-lion).

Elaboration: An exploration of other ancient faiths shows that Hinduism is not alone in having Divinities with animal attributes. The ancient Greeks worshiped the God Pan, who has the hindquarters, legs and horns of a goat, and the Sea Gods Ichthyocentaurs, with human heads and torsos, the front legs of a horse and the serpentine tails of fish. In Egypt's pantheon, Anubis (God of the Underworld) is a falcon-headed man, as is Ra (the Sun God). Thoth (Lord of Wisdom and of the Moon) has the head of an ibis or a baboon, and His consort, Bastet, has the form of a cat or a lioness. The Mesoamerican peoples worshiped Quetzalcoatl, a feathered serpent. The Assyrians feared the powerful serpent Goddess Tiamat and revered various winged beings. In Japan—where Buddhism and Shintoism are intertwined—Kitsune the fox and Tengu the bird man are powerful shape-shifters who can transform into human or inanimate shapes to trick humans. Many shrines there are guarded by a pair of magical lion-dogs known as the Koma-inu or Shishi.

In a discussion with Christians, who tend to ridicule Hinduism on this point, you can recall that winged angels are half-human and half-bird. Four-headed beings called the Cherubims were central in the early Christianity. In the Bible's *Book of Revelation*, John writes:



Hanuman carries Iraivan Temple from India to Hawaii. With His monkey body, Hanuman is one of many non-human Deities in the Hindu pantheon. A devotee of Lord Rama, He is regarded as a powerful ally to all on the spiritual path, a symbol of strength and dedication.

"I saw a throne standing in heaven; and the One who was sitting on the throne... In the center, grouped around the throne itself, were four animals with many eyes, in front and behind. The first animal was like a lion, the second like a bull, the third animal had a human face, and the fourth animal was like a flying eagle. Each of the four animals had six wings..." (4: 1-8). The description matches an account by Jewish prophet Elijah centuries before. Importantly, these beings are the most powerful beings in the pantheon, closest to the Creator.

Over the millennia, worship and awareness of Deities with animal features was eclipsed in most cultures as the monotheistic religions grew into prominence. Were these beings mere myth and imagination, as depicted by modern scholars? Or were the peoples of ancient times aware of a mystical reality that has been sealed off? In most cultures, the old Gods have been put in exile. Only in Hinduism does such worship thrive in unbroken continuity.

One might note the obvious fact that *Homo sapiens*, too, is an animal specie, one among many.

4

Why do Hindus cremate the dead?

Hindus arrange swift cremation of the dead, ideally within 24 hours. The fire and accompanying rites sever ties to earthly life and give momentum to the soul for its continuing spiritual journey.

HINDUS TRADITIONALLY CREMATE their dead because a fiery dissolution of the body brings swifter, more complete release of the soul than burial, which preserves the soul's psychic connection to its just-ended earthly life. After death, the departed soul hovers close to the earth plane in its astral body, emotionally attached to the physical body and its old surroundings, still able to see this material world. The funeral rites and burning of the body signify spiritual release, notifying the soul that, in fact, death has come. Some of the funeral chants address the deceased, urging the soul to relinquish attachments and continue its spiritual journey. The Gods and devas are invoked to assist the soul in its transition. The fire severs ties to earthly life and gives momentum to the soul, granting at least momentary access to refined, heavenly realms. All attention is on a singular goal, as expressed in this prayer from the *Rig Veda*: "Release him again, O Agni, to the fathers. The one offered to you now proceeds to his destiny. Putting on new life, let him approach the surviving, let him reunite with a [new] body, All-Knowing One!" (10. 16. 5).

Elaboration: Hindus do not believe in bodily resurrection and the reuniting of each soul with its physical body, so they place no importance on preserving the corpse, which is the intent of burial in Christianity and Islam. The Hindu belief in reincarnation gives assurance that death is merely the soul's release from the current life. An ancient text puts it simply, "Even as the snake sloughs off its skin, even as the bird leaves its shell, even as in its waking state the soul forgets happenings of the dream state, thus does the soul migrate from one body to another..." (*Tirumantiram* 2132).

Family and friends take an active part in releasing the departed soul: preparing the body, joining in the rituals, transporting the body to the cremation grounds and lighting the pyre. After cremation, the ashes are ceremoniously committed to a river (often the Ganga), lake or ocean, along with garlands and flowers. While the rites allow family a dignified farewell and an opportunity to express grief, all present know there will be other bodies, other lives. Mourning is never suppressed, but scriptures admonish against excessive lamentation and encourage joyous release. The departed soul feels the impact of emotional forces directed at him, and prolonged grieving can hold him in earthly consciousness, inhibiting full transition to the inner worlds. Hindus speak of death as the



A body, wrapped in cotton cloth, is placed on a funeral pyre made of stacks of wood. Flames return the elements to nature, leaving purified ashes that will be placed in a river or other body of water.

Great Departure, regarding it as life's most exalted moment. The death anniversary is called Liberation Day.

Cremation is prescribed in the Vedic texts, and Hindu funeral customs are remarkably uniform throughout India. Cremation is also practiced by other Indic faiths, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism, and is becoming popular worldwide. Many believe the body should be disposed of as swiftly and cleanly as possible and that fire is the purest way to return the physical elements to their source. It is less expensive than burial, with a smaller impact on the environment. Recent figures show cremations are chosen by 35% in the US, 72% in the UK, 99.9% in Japan, 68% in Canada and 49% in China.

Infants and small children, however, are buried in Hindu tradition. Another exception pertains to enlightened souls, for whom the body is often interred in a crypt filled with salt, and a shrine or temple is constructed at the site. Sacred texts assert their remarkable disciplines have endowed the physical body with immense spiritual power, which can radiate for generations, giving blessings through this sacred *samadhi*, especially if that soul remains aware of the Earth plane.



HEALTH

What's a Veggie Student to Do?

A sorely deficient diet burdens many young vegetarian Hindus attending college in the US, but some schools are responding to calls for change

BY POOJA PATEL

EVERY YEAR A NEW GROUP OF HINDU SENIORS HEADS OFF TO their first year of college, many to Ivy Leagues and prestigious schools around the country. A student's entry to college can be likened to stepping into a realm of brand new possibilities and opportunities for growth, friendship, education, and, most of all, discovering freedom. Often overlooked, food plays an integral role in the mood, health and perhaps even success of a college student. "You are what you eat" seems to be more apparent than ever in the age of organics, "Super Size Me" and Food Network. More often than not, by the time summer break rolls around and students are back home, the impact college cafeteria food has had on their bodies, especially for freshmen still adapting to a new lifestyle, is beyond noticeable. What was once termed the "freshman fifteen" may now be bordering on the "freshman fifty." Pounds added, that is.

Most vegetarian Hindu students spend their college years living off of unhealthy yet easy-to-find foods. Pizza, pasta and salad have made their mark in college cafeterias as "safe" staples for the vegetarian. However, many schools across the nation are spearheading the effort to make more nutritious dishes—such as crispy fried tofu with

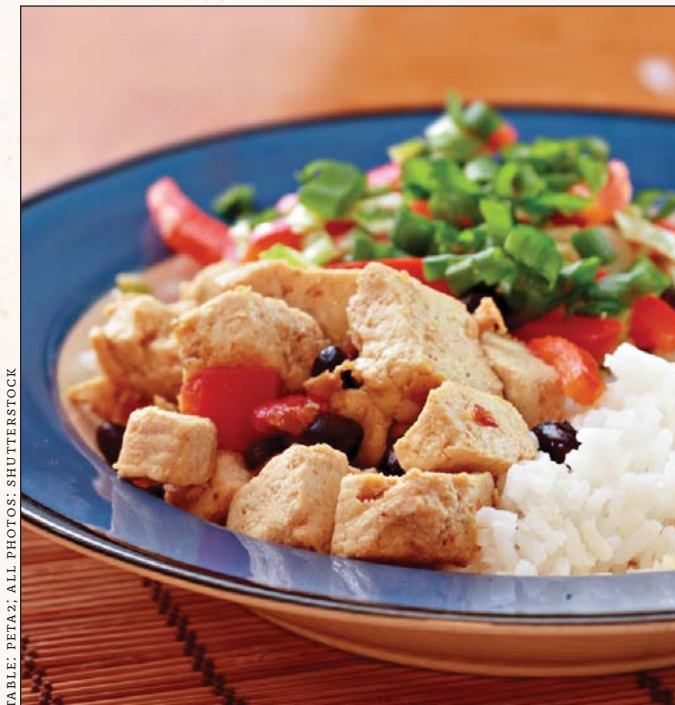
pineapple chutney, sesame-noodle and pea-pod casserole, and sautéed portabella mushrooms over polenta—just as readily available.

The fantasy of many a college student is to eat their favorite foods, snack on sugary sodas and binge on junk food for weeks on end, away from the prying eyes of Mom and Dad. Despite how delicious (or not) that may sound, this sort of diet lacks balance and nutrition; there is a severe absence of vegetables and protein-rich ingredients, such as legumes. Finding a wide selection of healthy food that meets the needs of students while still tasting great can be an immense challenge, especially if you depend on one of many university dining halls that operate on the concept that salad and pasta bars are enough for vegetarian students.

Rupak Dhoot, a student at Austin College here in my home state of Texas, shares, "A majority of my meals consisted of assorted boiled vegetables, bread, pasta and, in all seriousness, quite a few peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. My meals were highly variable.... One consistent thing I could count on eating was cereal. Overall, the school seemed to recognize that there were many vegetarian students they needed to cater to, so there was always an option. However, as a picky eater, the options were not

"Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet."

—ALBERT EINSTEIN



Choices, choices: Tastes like chicken? Not quite. This stir fry marshals tofu and fresh vegetables to give students the nutrition they need to be alert and study well. At right, we present the top ten vegetarian-friendly colleges in the US, recently chosen by thousands of respondents to a survey by animal rights spin-off group peta2.

always appetizing. One problem was finding a good source of protein. A staple that serves as a rich source of protein in Indian households, dal, was obviously not available. Finding lentils, beans, nuts, etc., to satisfy the nutritional need for protein was a daily challenge."

A deficient, unbalanced diet similar to what many of these students are eating on a regular basis can cause most people to feel physically and mentally lethargic and dull. Deepika Ram from Texas A&M University admits, "At night I would go back to my room just craving for my bed. I was usually exhausted at the end of the day. Another common trend I saw was that, with a large workload, I found myself staying up late and eating whatever was available, snacking on whatever I could find. With a lack of sleep, many times I found myself sleepy in class and even drowsier after a large lunch."

A balanced, healthy diet helps students feel energetic, poised, concentrated and clear-minded. But they don't necessarily realize that their diet is the likely cause of the carb hangover they feel when trying to study or drag themselves out of bed in the morning (set aside whatever else they may be doing to contribute to that, such as partying). Akshar Patel from the Illinois Institute of Technology echoed the same complaint: "Because I lacked a proper breakfast every morning, I found it difficult to pay attention in class. Around many a meal time, the strong hunger distracted me from my professors."

The importance of a healthy diet cannot be emphasized enough. It provides weight control, promotes adequate sleep, enables a student to meet his or her daily nutritional needs and to enjoy a higher overall quality of life. Eating a balanced diet is one of the easiest ways to protect oneself from many diseases associated with aging, including diabetes and heart disease, which young people seem to be acquiring at increasingly alarming rates. According to the US Department of Agriculture's new food plate (which recently replaced the more common food pyramid), you should make half your plate fruits and

peta2's Most Vegetarian-Friendly Colleges

- 1 Indiana University-Bloomington**
Newspaper and television stations all over the Midwest were buzzing about IU's options: Sesame Noodle & Pea Pod Casserole, Vegan Garden Burger, Hot Cakes and more. All vegetarian and vegan options are clearly marked and always delicious.
- 2 Humboldt State University**
This Cal State school features entrees like Vegan Stuffed Green Pepper, Sautéed Portabella over Polenta, and even Soy Yogurt. Students tell us they are absolutely overjoyed with their vegetarian options.
- 3 University of Puget Sound**
UPS certainly delivers. Featuring options like Vegan Cheeseburger, Vegan Biscuits & Gravy, Vegan Field Roast Sloppy Joe and more, the vegan options at this school could convert even the most die-hard meat-eater.
- 4 Yale University**
Yale's options include BBQ Vegan Ribs, Chef's Choice Vegan Pizza, Vegan Enchiladas and a rotating list of other phenomenal options.
- 5 SUNY Purchase**
Some of our peta2 Street Team members tipped us off to the all-vegetarian Terra Ve café on campus. We found out the school serves meals such as Tofu Marsala, Tempeh Cacciatore, and Tabouli & Tomato Salad with Tofu.
- 6 Oberlin College**
Estimates put the vegetarian population of this Ohio school at about 40 percent. Meat-eaters, watch your back! With Southwest Vegetable Paella, Mexican-Style Lentil Bake, Teriyaki Tofu with Pineapple and many more options, there's no reason to eat PB&J.
- 7 New York University**
For starters, NYU is close to many of the best vegetarian restaurants in the country. And on campus it promotes Weekly Vegetarian Nights and Monthly All Vegan Meals. Daily goodies such as Risotto with Spinach and Sun-Dried Tomatoes, Sweet and Sour Tofu, and Caribbean Baked Beans are always just a dining hall away.
- 8 University of California-Berkeley**
It makes sense that a school integral to the protest movements of the 60s would stand up to corporate meat mongers. Sure enough. Students' brains here are fueled by Tofu Scramble, Vegan Meatloaf and Hazelnut Cutlets, among other fabulous foods.
- 9 University of Pennsylvania**
Rivalling a gourmet vegetarian restaurant, UPenn gets it done with Fettuccine with Vegan Tomato Artichoke Alfredo, Crispy Fried Tofu with Pineapple Chutney, and Vegan Carrot Cake with Tofutti Cream Cheese Icing.
- 10 University of Florida**
Home of Animal Activists of Alachua, one of the country's most dynamic animal rights groups, it's no surprise this school made the list. Daily vegan options in the "Vegan Corner's" rotation include Tofu Creole, BBQ Boca Burger and Thai Peanut Noodles.



More than salad: (left) A salad bar is helpful, but vegetarians need food with some serious substance, too. This is especially students of students; they are still growing physically and are using a lot of energy for their studies. (right) So, how about these mouth-watering vegan lasagna rolls?

the school, about the same as eating a meal off-campus. Accommodating the requests of vegetarian customers would not necessarily be more expensive; it would simply depend on the demand. This becomes obvious at schools such as the University of Pennsylvania, where dramatic change has been afoot simply in the sheer number of vegetarian restaurants around the area, as well as the tremendous increase in other restaurants catering to vegetarians. Revamps such as this are linked to a greater demand for nutritious vegetarian food, including from non-vegetarians. Even grocery stores in the area appear to be catching up on the trend, providing entire sections dedicated to vegetarian products.

Bon Appetit Management Company, an onsite restaurant company that provides cafe services to schools from Massachusetts Institute of Technology to Seattle University, is also taking steps toward providing healthier vegetarian options. The company makes an effort to cook nutritious dishes from scratch using fresh ingredients. The Princeton Review has,

for several years, named this company the "No. 1 College Food Service in the Country." In 1999, Bon Appetit launched a Farm to Fork initiative, buying at least 20 percent, and often more, of its vegetables and other products within a 150-mile radius and having waste composted and distributed to area farms each week.

The nationwide campaign Meatless Mondays is on a mission to encourage mindful eating. Contrary to what the name suggests, animal proteins aren't necessarily prohibited in the dining halls involved in the effort. But for one day a week, the dining services involved offer additional vegetarian and vegan options to consumers to promote awareness about dietary choices among students. Already a staple at about 50 colleges, including Syracuse University, the University of California at Davis and even Oxford University, the program could see more than a tenfold increase at college campuses this fall. Sodexo, the food provider to about 650 colleges, will offer Meatless Mondays to its institutional clients starting next semester. Campuses and food providers now have more options because of the growing number of people committed to being vegetarian or vegan.

What You Can Do?

Moving from home to college is such an immense life change, the last you need is to be improperly nourished. If you're unhappy with your school's dining options, don't be afraid to take your concerns to campus dining services personnel. Use your voice; you are the paying customer. This is a way students can take a stand and be active in helping change the policies of colleges.

Students across the country are pushing for change, and they have had their fair share of successes. For example, at St. Mary's College of Maryland, students pushed Bon Appetit Management Company, the school's food provider, for more vegetarian options. After a Facebook campaign, a protest against popular fast-food giant Chick-fil-A and

vegetables; and at least half of your grains should be whole grains.

Priya Wiersba, who attends the University of Michigan, says, "Whenever I eat healthily, I feel more energetic and better about myself in general. Sometimes, when I am not paying attention to what I'm eating before an exam, I will feel worse when taking the exam. Eating a healthy breakfast in general helps my concentration and helps me stay awake and aware during class."

What Colleges Are Up To

Many schools are not making decently nutritious and varied foods available to vegetarian students. However, others are taking measures to make vegetarians feel more welcome, in particular the University of California. Their Davis campus runs campus farms, where produce grown is often sold to the dining halls. The UC system has done a fine job of responding to students' requests for wider vegetarian selections in cafeterias, particularly at such urban-liberal-progressive campuses as the one at Berkeley, where students were originally faced with resistance from dining services staff. That changed after tables were set outside the dining halls with a petition, which eventually gained more than 1,200 signatures as well as the support of more than one-fifth of Berkeley's dorm population. The food service staff soon fulfilled the students' requests. After a month of meetings, the administration agreed to provide at least one fully vegan entrée at every meal.

Not all colleges are so accommodating. In some cases, food service staff are directed to simply remove the meat from a non-vegetarian meal and call it vegetarian. This practice fails to add variety to meals and can discourage students from trusting the dining staff's options. Most university students buy meal plans, which are not included in regular tuition fees. Separate vegetarian meal plans are almost never available. The cost per meal is around \$6-10, depending on



student meetings with Bon Appetit, their requests for a greater variety of food choices were met. In April of this year, a petition for more vegetarian options on campus, now bearing more than 1,750 names, began making its way through Utah State University. Lauren Mata, a member of Vegan News, said, "It's kind of a fight for your food. You don't want to be a burden for them, but, at the same time, you've got to eat."

While you work to convince your campus dining services that nourishing vegetarian options will make students more successful and benefit the institution as well, you can also take matters into your own

me as a high school student, and while college seems to be closer on the horizon every day, as excited as I am to be introduced to a new place, I am also eager to see what my college campus cafeteria will have in store for me, and what I can do to make it even better.

POOJA PATEL, 15, is a sophomore at Robert E. Lee Senior High School in Midland, Texas. She actively participates in her local Hindu youth group. E-mail: pooja.patel.mp@gmail.com

9 Ways You Can Improve the Diet on Your Campus

Petition. Whether or not you are on the campus food services committee, work to get students to sign an open letter requesting more vegetarian options in the dining facilities.

Talk to the People in Charge. Schedule a meeting with the school dietitian and/or food service director in charge of ordering food for the dining halls.

Make Suggestions. Provide simple, cost-effective suggestions for plant-based options.

Provide Information. Give the director a copy of the list of companies that produce vegetarian food products.

Be Practical. It is unlikely that your college will open an Indian vegetarian kitchen for its students. Hearty vegetarian burritos, pasta primavera (lots of veggies!) and tofu burgers are more practical, more the norm and cover a broad base of vegetarian tastes.

Include Treats. The dining hall at Connecticut College in New London offers vegan options at every meal. It also serves Tofutti and Rice Dream bars, which are frozen, non-dairy ice cream alternatives. At get this: every Thursday night, the vegetarian dining hall provides fruits and vegetables for juicing.

Request Clear Labeling. Work with the dining halls to label all vegetarian foods with ingredient information, and to make comment cards available for student feedback. Dining services will continue providing vegetarian meals only if they are in demand. If some students are not satisfied with the dining options, go back to dining services with new suggestions.

Help Taste Test! The University of Maryland at College Park recently created a "Vegetarian/Vegan Advisory Board" composed of students, the school dietitian, a student employee and dining hall managers. They meet monthly to test recipes, with the goal of improving the vegetarian menu and adding more non-meat choices. Wow!

Promote, Promote, Promote. Work with the food service director to promote the new vegetarian options in the school newspaper and the food service circular.



How to Visit a Hindu Temple

Writing for the popular *Huffington Post*, Deepa Iyer created a basic guide for Westerners on how to survive—and enjoy—their first visit to a temple

BY DEEPA S. IYER



WHEN I SAT DOWN TO WRITE A POST on how to visit a Hindu temple, I'll admit that I was initially baffled. How does one visit a Hindu temple? In a literal sense, it appears obvious. First, get yourself to one. Second, take off your shoes, and third, step in. Visit, in the most fundamental sense of the word, accomplished.

A visit anywhere, though, is so much more than just the physical action of stepping in and stepping out. The significance varies from one individual to the next. A vacation to Spain or a business trip to Detroit sound vastly different, but both involve the individual going through the motions of life in a given location and concocting a mental snapshot of the entire experience to pull out in the future.

A trip's purpose doesn't always have concrete shape and form. Because many might not have a tangible reason for visiting a Hindu temple (including myself on many occasions), I instead decided to make this a Lonely Planet-style guide to visiting it. This role of a guide of sorts, helping the interested visitor, is more illuminating than telling people how to visit a place.

It is not every Hindu who attends temples. Some schools of Hinduism even eschew temples and the rituals often affiliated with them. And there is no such thing as the average temple. They reflect the diversity of Hinduism itself, varying architecturally by region, town or village of India, by historical era and philosophical school of thought, or by a specific diaspora's spiritual inclinations. However, as I perceive it, there are three rules of thumb, features that a visitor has a high probability of facing when stopping by any Hindu temple.

Rule of Thumb 1: The Confluence of Polytheism and Monotheism

First and foremost, a temple features either one or several shrines containing *murtis*, images of Hindu Deities to whom the shrines are dedicated. Often a single shrine will dominate the others, reflecting the temple's affiliation with a primary Deity. You may witness devotees circling the shrines clockwise, letting go of worldly thoughts before they stand before the God, or offering prayers in front of the Deity.

To me, a recognition of unity in diversity presides at nearly every Hindu temple: an arena in which polytheism and monotheism fluidly interact. Even as multiple shrines combine to form a single temple, several Deities mirror the diversity of the indescribable Brahman, the ultimate consciousness underlying existence.

**Rule of Thumb 2:
The Confluence of Ritual and Devotion**
Murtis often reflect the bhakti, or devotional, aspect of Hinduism. Age-old stories of justice, compassion and love encourage us to honor a Deity, placing Him or Her on a pedestal within a temple and striving to connect with that transcendental being.

Inside the temple halls, perhaps the most colorful event that a visitor might notice is the observance of rituals, or pujas, that represent offerings to the Divine. Typically, such rituals symbolize the relationship between the Supreme and the individual, humanizing the Supreme and conversely implying the presence of God in the individual's heart. Rituals involve waking the Deity up in the morning with Sanskrit chants, bathing the Deity with milk, clarified butter and water, dressing the Deity and, in the evening, symbolically putting Him or Her to sleep.

Rule of Thumb 3: The Confluence of Individual and Infinite

Pilgrims attend a temple to receive darshan, meaning "sight" in Sanskrit: a metaphysical/metaphorical connection with the Supreme. The image represents an aid for mentally forging this connection.

See the priest circling the Deity with a flame and then extending it to the temple-goers? This is the *arati* ceremony, which occurs multiple times a day at nearly all Hindu temples. One explanation is that an *arati* represents the symbolic surrender of one's existence to the Supreme: a moment that many individuals use for introspection and prayer. As it circles the Deity, the flame symbolizes the

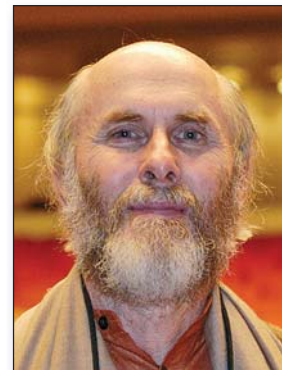
individual soul's lifelong journey. Then the priest extends the flame, one-by-one, to each individual in the crowd beside the shrine: a union of all within an ultimate circle of consciousness. But there are many more explanations for it, and layers of meaning, as with everything in a Hindu temple.

If ever you plan to book a trip to your nearest Hindu temple, I hope that this brief guide gives you some food for thought. On a less symbolic level than my rules of thumb, they're great places to go for general people watching and good food—many have scrumptious vegetarian cafeterias. So, if you feel like wandering over to the nearest Hindu temple, here's to a happy and, hopefully, more informed visit.

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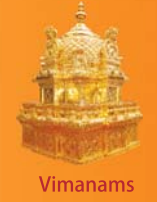
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Hindu Heritage Endowment

FLOODS LAY BARE THE PLIGHT OF PAKISTAN'S HINDUS

Dr. Arvind Chandrakantan, a New York anesthesiologist and critical care physician, set up the Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund with Hindu Heritage Endowment last year. At the same time, torrential monsoon rains sent waters rushing into the flood plains of Sindh Province, home to the vast majority of Pakistan's 2.5 million Hindus.

He used the fund to send \$6,000 in immediate relief to stricken Hindu families. But much more was needed. The Indus River had spilled five to seven miles beyond its banks. The flood affected a quarter of Pakistan and made vivid the plight of Pakistan's Hindu minority.

“Lots of long-term problems come with a disaster,” Dr. Chandrakantan explained. “Most Pakistani Hindus lack access to education. They are sons of the soil, and a catastrophe like this wipes away their lands, forces some into bonded labor, puts their legal status at risk, and brings on a state of lawlessness.” He added that some Christian sects have taken advantage of the disaster to proselytize.



A bonded Hindu Pakistani laborer shows the contract that binds him

Not many Pakistani Hindus live in the US, he explains, so he has used the floods to help the American-Hindus become aware of their co-religionists' difficulties. To encourage contributions to the Fund, he candidly points out to fellow American Hindus how much prosperity they enjoy and reminds them that as they sow, so will they eventually reap. “All the advantages we enjoy today are there because someone, at some time, made a sacrifice for us. Contributing to the fund is a way for us to give back, to make a difference for someone whose life can be turned around by attending to basic needs: literacy, education and freedom from servitude.

“Hindus are not the only group suffering in Pakistan,” he admits, “but we understand their issues better. We are, after all, Hindus.” He prays that this sense of oneness remains well after the flood waters recede.

Those who wish to join Dr. Chandrakantan in contributing to the Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund (fund #81) can do so by contacting Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012 extension 244 or hhe@hindu.org, or giving directly at www.hheonline.org/donate.shtml



The Kalash tribe, said to descend from Alexander the Great's army, is currently struggling to preserve its Hindu traditions in a Taliban stronghold

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS									
Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		T. Anbu & Gowthamy Balakumaran 150.00		Alex Ruberto 45.00		Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund			
Roshan Harilela	375.00	N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00	Aran Sambandar	162.00	Danyse Crotti	100.00		
Sakuntalai Krishnan	72.95	Eliathamby Kuganeswaran	300.00	Hitesvara Saravan	108.00	Hiranya Gowda	99.00		
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Niraj Thaker	76.50	Michael Schall	20.00	Vignesh Sukumaran	54.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.53		
Michael Zimmermann	8.00	Vignesh Sinnathurai	60.00	Devi Tandavan	108.00	Balaji Narasimhan	75.00		
Other Donations	70,000.00	Thavaputhiran Sivapalan	300.00	Vayudeva Varadan	63.00	Toshadevi Nataraja	60.00		
Total	72,834.48	Total	7,330.00	Shama Vinayaga	200.00	Ganga Sivanathan	300.00		
		Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		Michael Wasylikiw 432.00		Devi Tandavan	37.00		
		Mano Navaratnarajah 75.00		8,340.71		Niraj Thaker	33.00		
				Mathavasi Travel Fund		Total	824.06		
				Anonymous 25.00		Hindu American Foundation Endowment			
				Udayan Care Endowment Fund		Niraj Thaker		33.00	
				Rajendra Giri 15.00		The Endowment for Global Hindu Rights			
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				Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired		Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment			
				Alex Ruberto 60.00		Victoria Lynne Johnson		11.00	
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						Total		97.00	
				Puri Monasteries Fund		Jaffna Kannathiddu Kali Kovil Endowment			
				Michael Zimmermann 6.00		Natraj Narayanswami		21.00	
						Hindu Temple of the Woodlands Endowment			
				Manitha Neyam Trust Fund		Urmil Shukla		2,000.00	
				Natraj Narayanswami 21.00		Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund			
				Bala Sivaceyon 39.55		Vasant Datta		101.00	
				Total 60.55		Raghu Grandhige		1,001.00	
						Visvas Patel		11.00	
				Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage		Total		1,113.00	
				Rajendra Giri 85.00		Bharathi Yoga Dharma Fund			
						Anonymous		20.00	
				Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund		Murugamoorthi Thirukkivil Endowment			
				Ananda Manickam 50.00		N. Balasubramanian		25,000.00	
				Anonymous 100.00		Panchangam Endowment Fund			
				Total 150.00		Anonymous		290.99	
				Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund		Rajkumar Alagesan		30.00	
				Anonymous 20.00		Asha Alahan		25.00	
				Visvas Patel 11.00		Sarsha Chilkurki		25.00	
				Chiranjivi Raparla 50.00		Sachin Choudhary		25.00	
				Total 81.00		Shyamadeva Dandapani		51.00	
				Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		Tina Desai		50.35	
				Hinduism Today 5,000.00		Ramesh Ekambaram		25.00	
				Hiranya Gowda 153.00		Manivannan Govindan		25.00	
				Total 5,153.00		Malini Gowrish		25.00	
						Frank Griswold		25.00	
				Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		Midori Hatakeyama		25.00	
				Shyamadeva Dandapani 63.00		Murali Krishna		50.00	
				Ezhil Venketesan 26.00		Radha & Ganesh Krishnan		25.00	
				Total 89.00		Narinderkoemar Kuldip Singh		5.00	
				Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Gautam Kumaran		25.00	
				Victoria Lynne Johnson 17.00		Sriram Lakshminarayanan		25.00	
				Sakuntalai Krishnan 72.95		Shankar Mallampalli		50.00	
				Total 89.95		Marcia Miller		25.00	
				Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Sivaramakrish Muthukrishnan		51.00	
				Vinaya Alahan 150.00		Pratima Muzumdar		25.00	
				Jeri Arin 300.00		Tupil & Ranjana Narsiman		30.00	
				Anonymous 503.00		Sriram Natarajan		25.00	
				N. Balasubramanian 5,000.00		Easvan Param		25.00	
				Marlene Carter 162.00		Sunil Parmar		25.00	
				Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam 60.00		Paramesha Pillay		50.00	
				Rajendra Giri 15.00		Chamundi Sabanathan		108.00	
				Padmaja Patel 100.00		Muthu Senthilkumar		25.00	
				Subramaniam Pennathur 50.01		Dharshi Sivakumar		25.00	
				Chamundi Sabanathan 108.00		Tandu Sivanathan		25.00	
				Ganga Sivanathan 150.00		Gowri Sriraman		25.00	
				Sivaruban Sivanesan 150.00		Jay Stiefeld		1.25	
				Andrew Stich 200.00		Venkatarama Varadarajan		25.00	
				Soma Sundaram 30.00		Nanda Kishore Velpula		36.00	
				Total 6,978.01		S.R. Viswanathan		25.00	
				Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund		Richard Watson		100.00	
				Vinaya Alahan 150.00		Kathleen Whalen		50.00	
				Anonymous 316.00		Total		1,503.59	
				Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam 60.00		Digital Dharma Endowment			
				Total 526.00		Digital Dharma Donors		6,970.00	
				Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Anonymous		5,836.36	
				Chellappa Deva 35.00		Total		12,806.36	
				India Hindu Tribals Endowment		Insurance Premiums			
				Rajendra Giri 85.00		Mrunal Patel		3,003.00	
				Niraj Thaker 15.00		Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment			
				Total 100.00		Other Donations		600.00	
				Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund					
				Vayudeva Varadan 54.00		Total Contributions		\$269,926.53	
				Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund		Funds at Market Value, Jun 30, 2011			
				Kodisvara Jothiswarar 12.00		Total Endowment Funds		\$10,467,731.59	
				Rani Jothiswarar Estate 101.08		Total Pooled Income Funds		\$221,865.14	
				Siva Jothiswary 12.00					
				Total 125.08		Grand Total		\$10,689,596.73	



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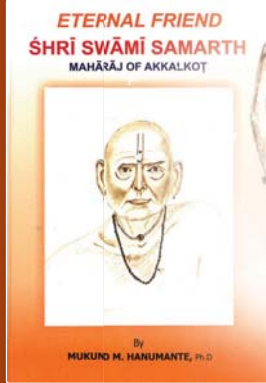


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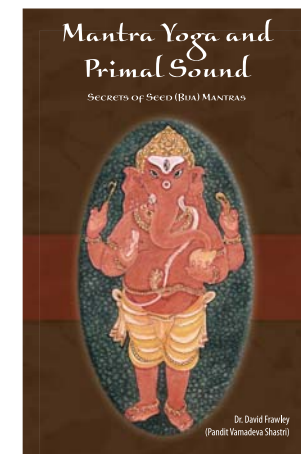
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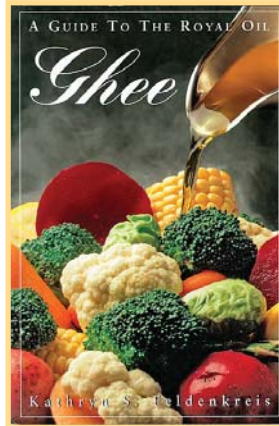
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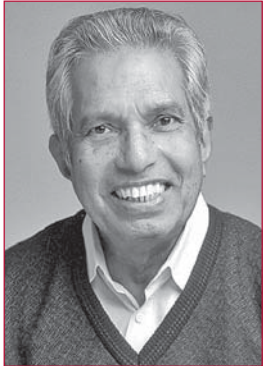


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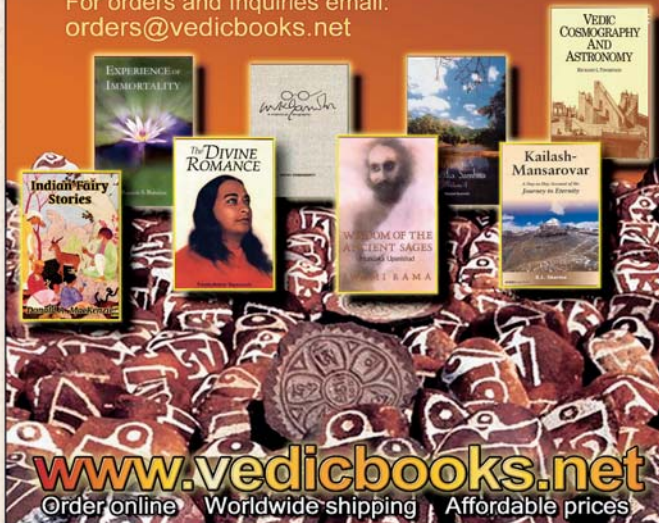
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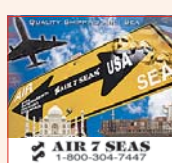
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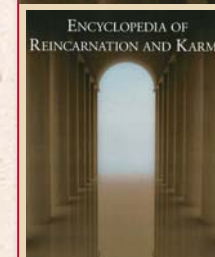
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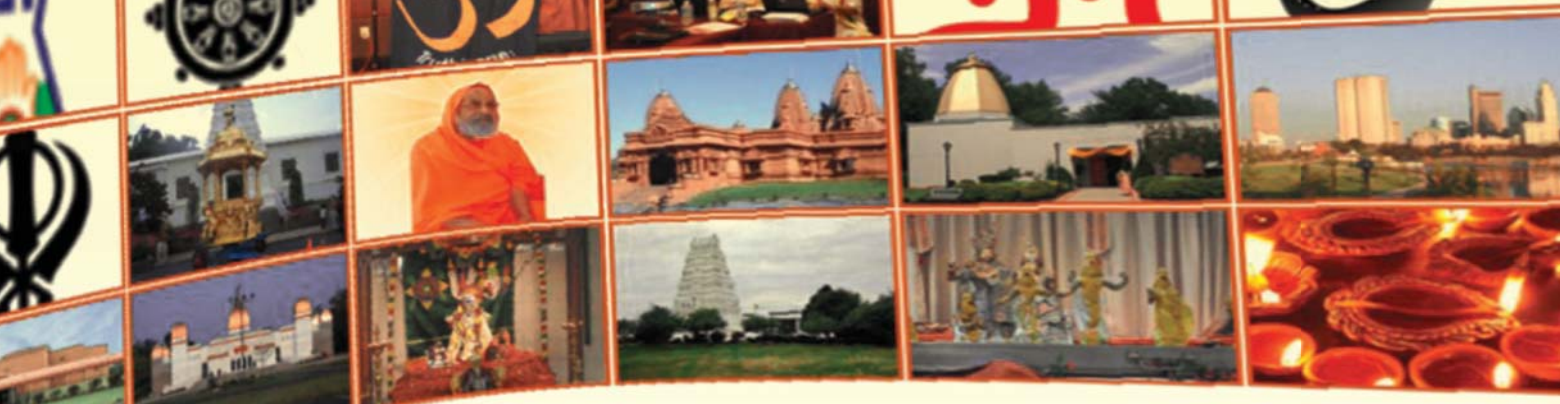
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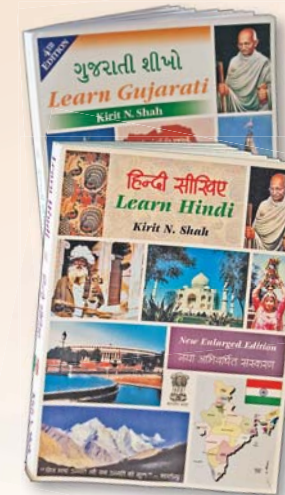
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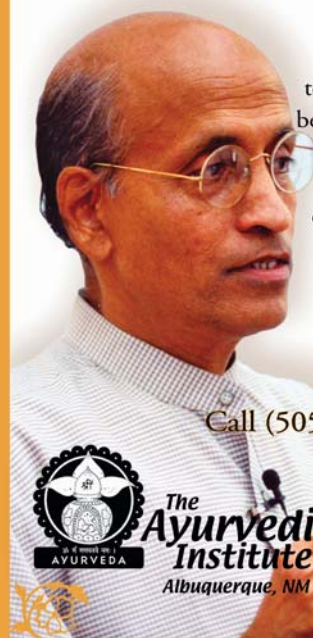
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The Silent Witness

1. The Moon,
Like a full bloomed lotus,
Is at my eastern window.
Art Thou a messenger from Heaven?
What tidings dost Thou bring?
What charms dost Thou cast upon me?

I come not with “breaking news”
Nor am I the enchanted Goddess
The wine drunk poets
Never tire to paint in words.
I am a silent witness.

2. My fauna and flora weep.
I hear a cry from the ocean deep.
You lay waste My lands
At the touch of your hands.
I have borne you with great patience.
For too long have I been
A silent witness

3. The Sun
Is at my eastern window;
The glow that sets
Life on Earth in flow.

Radiant is the dawn.
Soaring are my spirits.
My Lord, tell me:
How shall the day unfold?

I neither rise nor set.
The Centre, I am.

The light of love
That embraces
The mountains and the valleys,
The strong and the weak,
The wicked and the wise.
I mirror Him,
The Central Sun.
I am a silent witness.

4. My Lord of Light,
Thou knowest my heart.
Like a candle oblivious
Of the power of the sun,
Like a wave that knows not

The depths of the ocean,
My soul wanders in the wilderness
Not knowing the Supreme Self.
I am a child in Thy Grace, an embryo
Traveling through time and space.

Tell me, My Lord of Light
What is to become of man?

5. My child, dismay not, for
Immortal is man, a soul.
The scriptures declare,
“Fire cannot burn it;
Water cannot wet it;
The winds cannot blow it.”

But man travelling through matter,
Is bound by His immutable laws
In his journey of evolution towards Him.

Like water finding its own level,
The soul reaches its own sublime heights
Or depths of darkness.

Waves of your thoughts
Have washed you to the sea of sorrow.
The genie out of the bottle haunts you.
Your deeds have led you to the brink—
With only drops of radiation to drink.

6. I called you
Through the sound of AUM
Reverberating in the Cosmos.
You did not hear.
I stood before you
In crimson colours of the setting sun.
You could not see.
I caressed you with the breeze
of my compassion.
You did not feel.

From your hearts am I exiled,
To a distance that even your yardstick of
Light years cannot measure.

7. My gift of the Garden
Is dug with graves with your
Shovels of quarterly reports.
Like the bird that sings
And impales itself on a thorn,
Your souls are hooked to the
Profit and loss account.

Silenced is the music of the oceans,
The song of the birds—nay,
Banished is the beauty
From the face of the Earth.

8. My Garden shall be purified
By the fire of My Righteousness;
Cleansed by the waters of My Justice.

I am the wind that blows off
The billowing clouds of darkness,
The Love that balms the
Unfolding karma of the
Pilgrim souls.

9. Light the flames of compassion
In the altar of your hearts.
Unless hatred is answered with Love,
Until forgiveness arises in the hearts,
The chain that binds you
To life after life
Will not be cut.

Like the rivers that flow to the sea,
Let your thoughts flow
To the Ocean of My Love.
Immerse in that Ocean
And dissolve the haunting pains.

10. Chant My Name
I shall walk with you
Through your forests of fear.

Remember Me.
I shall carry you across
The Oceans on fire.

Call Me.
I shall ignite in you
The fires of courage
To retrace your steps to ME.

In My Immutable Laws
Is planted the seed of success,
The Grace of My Love,
The touch of your Mother.

My children,
Even though your mind
Vibrates in the arrogant colours
Of your ego, of your intellect.
Even though your soul is whipped
In the swirling winds of desire,
And tongues of judgment,
Like molten lava,
Are closing in from all sides,
Fear not.

For I am coming to fetch you Home.

I am Shiva.
I am not a silent witness.

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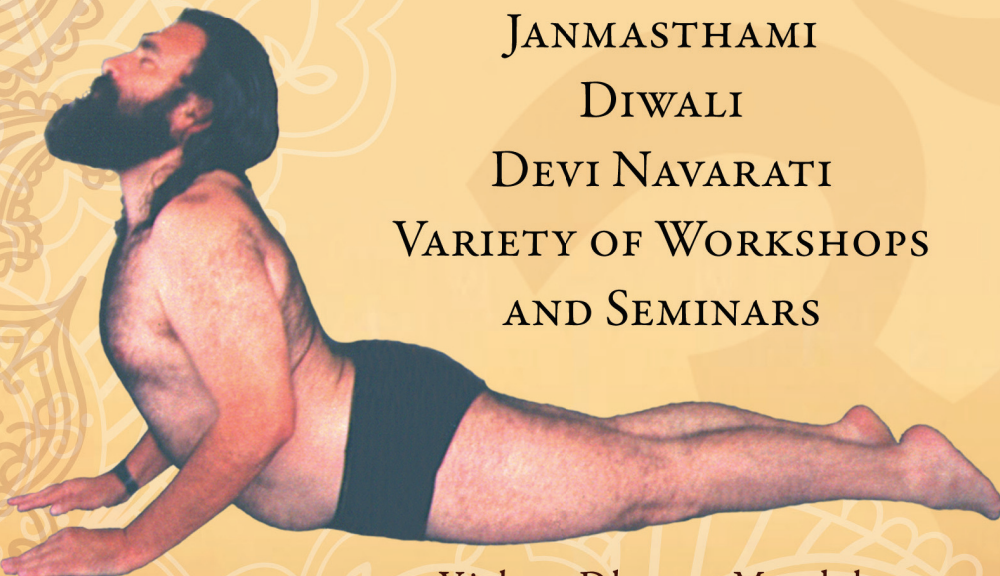
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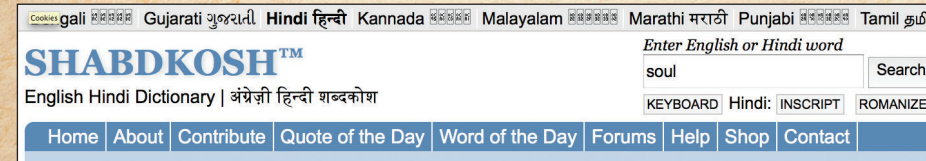
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EDUCATION

Internet Translation Tools Keep Alive A Multi-Language World Heritage

BY MADHURI SHEKHAR, LOS ANGELES
WHEN A LANGUAGE DIES, SO DOES A culture—its mores, meanings, values and outlooks, inextricably bound in daily discourse, the living embodiment of a community's history. Therefore, it is cause for concern when more and more Hindu youth around the world lose their connection with their mother tongues.

Radio's Sanskrit channel (www.newsonair.com/nsd_schedule.asp). Germany's University of Cologne has a great web app for the Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary (www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier).

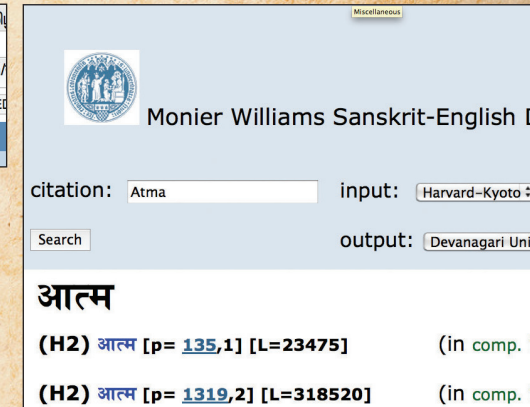
Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Hindi, etc., are not endangered in India. But they are losing ground among youth outside India.

As for Tamil, the web offers invaluable resources devoted to the conservation of Tamil for the Indian diaspora and wish to learn and practice the language. The Digital South Asia Library of the University of Chicago (dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries) has the best Tamil dictionary. The Tamil Virtual Academy (www.tamilvu.org) has a great online learning course. The online Project Madurai, led by Dr. Kalyanasundaram, one of the world's top Tamil scholars, has digitized over 400 Tamil works from the fifth century BCE

to the present (www.projectmadurai.org).

And you can now find resources for hundreds of other languages. Want to learn Kashmiri? No problem: be sure to check out the work done by the Indian Institute of Language Studies (iils.org) for more information on preserving Indian languages. Get involved in India's culture by joining INTACH (www.intach.org). On an international scale, *National Geographic's* Enduring Voices project is a truly remarkable effort to document the planet's endangered languages (travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/enduring-voices).

With automated translation services becoming more and more sophisticated by the day, we also have tools to bring the



Clockwise: Shabdkosh.com translates between English and eight different Indian languages; University of Cologne's access to the famed Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary; Freelang.net offers a myriad of dictionaries and translation services; DSLA's digital Tamil Lexicon

entire corpus of knowledge from one tongue to another. Preserving or learning another language is now a feasible and even fun adventure for coming generations.

But let's not forget that it all starts at home. Professor Omkar Kaul of the Indian Institute of Language Studies, an organization at the forefront of preserving native Indian vernaculars, believes in the importance of family involvement in keeping languages alive. "The language maintenance in a family is primarily the responsibility of the parents. If they use their language in conversing among themselves and also with their children, the children will acquire it with ease."